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From:

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THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY

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"THE ARK OF GOD," "APOSTOLIC LIFE," "TYNE CHYLDE,"
"WEAVER STEPHEN," "EVERY MORNING," "THE
PEOPLE'S FAMILY PRAYER BOOK,"
ETC., ETC.

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THE PSALTER.

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THE PSALTER.

I AM strenuously endeavouring to compress THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE within twenty-five volumes, and therefore I must leave the Psalter almost untouched ; I say "almost untouched," for even this volume, with all its closely-printed pages, hardly begins the work of expounding or amplifying the poetry of the Book of Psalms. This book alone would afford ample materials for the whole twenty-five volumes which I proposed to issue when I conceived the idea of THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE, so abundant and so rich are its immortal songs. This is emphatically the heart's own book, which is, indeed, at once a reason for expansion and condensation. Who would wish to expand the twenty-third psalm ? Is it not full to overflow of all sacred emotion and all noble thought concerning God who is the Shepherd of the universe ? Yet the twenty-third psalm could be sung in a hundred different ways, care being taken that the very variety of its adaptations might not be perverted into a weakness. We should take care how we try to vary the music of heaven. All my life long have I revelled in the Book of Psalms. What can I say about it now ? It grows in tenderness. Its thunders were never so solemn and majestic ; its minor strains never so delicate and comforting. Every psalm bears its own marks of inspiration. Human experience has been anticipated in all its innumerable phases. Is it nothing to have a

book which knows the soul through and through, and can express all its sorrow and all its rapture? How mountain-like is the sublime old Hebrew among the languages of earth! and how noble its billow-like swell amid the waves of meaner speech! David knew me. Asaph is my bosom friend. Solomon is my confidant. All the unnamed minstrels are bringing me music from heaven. I would they might all tarry with me for ever, for in their society I can know nothing of weariness and nothing of pain. Under the spell of their genius, oratory becomes poetry, and the rains of grief are turned into the rainbows of hope. We know what a great lake is among the mountains. How it redoubles the scene! how it softens all rocks, and makes the shadowed mountains quiver as with reverent joy! It is the mirror of the landscape. So is this Book of Psalms among the books of the Bible. All the other parts of the Bible are in the Psalms. There creation is repeated; there the wilderness is remembered; there the Church is outlined; there Christ is born; there the wail of Calvary sanctifies all other agony. There, too, is Sinai interpreted in righteousness, and there the Cross gives welcome to contrition. The Psalmists were not content to lift up their own voices in the worship of the Eternal God. Those voices in the estimation of the Psalmists were too feeble for the occasion. They must be accompanied—accompanied by thunders and billows, by organs and trumpets, by harps and cymbals. It seems as if the Psalmists could never have accompaniment enough. They would call all nature to their aid. Whatsoever had a voice or could make a sound was to be impressed into the holy service. Yet some amongst us, even at this late day, object to musical instruments in the sanctuary! Such objection is valid, if we never get beyond the instrument: if we are fascinated by the sound of brass, or the quiver of prepared chords; but if the instrument is used to multiply ourselves, to give us a larger personality, to find for us a vaster, grander, and

tenderer expression, then is the musical instrument not our master, but our servant. Pitiabie is the objection to musical instruments in aiding the public worship of God. To object to them is to show an utter ignorance of their scope and purpose. God has so constructed the universe that every star and every flower, every hill and every stream, shall contribute to swell the anthem of his praise.

I can picture a wonderful assembly around the Psalter. There are the saints who love the Lord, and are in quest of speech fit for the expression of all that belongs to him in the way of adoration and praise. Nowhere else can they find similar expression. All that is noble and all that is tender can be found here. Every name by which the Lord was ever known to ancient history is repeated in this solemn and impressive music. The English cannot do without the Hebrew: the Gentile is dependent on the Jew. In every particular, salvation is of the Jews; in our sublimest moods we flee to the Hebrew Scriptures for the only language that can give fit utterance to our noble and saintly rapture. Not only are the saints gathered around the Book of Psalms, but sinners also congregate with tears and sighs, that they may seek the Lord, and find words fit for the expression of broken-heartedness. The fifty-first psalm is the prodigal's highway back to pardon, to heaven, to God. How far soever human speech may go in the invention of expressions designed to set forth the depth and agony of contrition, it can never get beyond what we find in this wail of the heart,—this solemn outburst of sorrow and bitterness of soul on account of individual transgression. With the saints and the sinners there come a whole multitude of sorrowful souls; each knowing its own bitterness, and feeling the weight of its own burden; each feeling that the Psalms were written for his particular case, so exquisite is their thought, so tender their expression, so complete and soul-subduing their conception and

vision of God. Add to all this host those who are dumb in soul, men who are speechless on account of grief, and you will complete the host of readers and inquirers gathered in eagerness and gratitude around this music of the heart. It is along this line that I find proofs of the true unity of the race. What unity may be established by merely physical considerations it is open to science to determine. The spiritual student discovers lines of unity in the moral region which can never be destroyed. To think that thousands of years ago our deepest experiences were uttered for us! To think that in all countries the heart has felt the same agonies, borne the same burdens, wept the same tears, and cried out in various accents for the same deliverance! In the Psalms we find the real meaning of inspiration. This question does not turn upon dates, localities, mere personalities of a transient kind, but upon instruction which covers the whole breadth of human ignorance, and upon consolation which touches every quivering fibre of human sorrow. All this accounts for the Bible's growing influence. Not because the Bible tells men about distant lands and now archaic habits, but because it addresses the soul in all its sorrows, aspirations, desires, and bitternesses, because the Bible, or the Psalter in particular, brings messages to those who have lost all light and all hope, the Bible will remain for ever the supreme book and the supreme influence in literature.

The whole Bible may be said to be condensed into the Book of Psalms. Everything is related in poetry. All the plainest and least poetical works are turned into music. The Book of Job is repeated in the Book of Psalms. In Job we find the concrete and the personal, the intensely dramatic and realistic; yet in the Psalms we find the same personalities represented, the same devil, the same upright souls, the same temptations, the same fears, and the same ultimate deliverance.

Whether we read Job or the Psalms, we are in reality reading the same book. This observation holds good even of the Book of Proverbs. The Psalter is set between Job and the Proverbs in our canon; and account for it as we may, that would seem to be the best place for it. Nearly all the Proverbs are in some form in the Psalter. It seems to be the function and prerogative of poetry to take up all history, all proverbs, all moral maxims, and all commonplaces of human intercourse, and magnify and sublimate them into poetical expression. Can such singers be dead? Were they but so many songsters, like nightingales in the darkness, singing to human sorrow? and are they now dead, extinct, annihilated? It is impossible to believe this. To such singers, music was no mere enjoyment. It was an instrument by which they communicated divine revelation to human listeners. It was the soul in its highest raptures. It was the intensest enjoyment which the human can hold with the divine. Other music comes and goes, changing its fickle fashion without reason and without defence, but this solemn, glorious, booming music rolls on night and day, through all the centuries of human evolution. The men who sang such songs must be living; their immortality cannot be limited to their music. Would we could live in this Psalter all the rest of our days! We need it every word, and we need every word every hour. By various figures could our enjoyment be represented. We should be as men called to reap the largest harvest ever grown in the vineyards of earth. We should be as those privileged to hear spiritual music stealing down upon us from the hidden places of the sky. We should be as prodigals to whom the word of pardon and of love is being spoken in ever-varying tones, yet with such definiteness that the heart can never miss the sweet and healing message. In the Psalms we need find no controversy. In the music of the Church all controversy should be hushed. When men lecture, or preach, or discourse in any form, they provoke more or less

intellectual indignation on the part of those who listen to them ; but when the noble psalm or sweet hymn is being sung all controversy is silenced, and alienation is forgotten in brotherhood. When we are puzzled, therefore, by other portions of Scripture, and are inclined to high debate, and even to furious contention, let us suspend the angry combat, and go into the Psalter, that we may find a music which will reconcile us and unite us in holiest love. Blessed be God for the Psalter. It seems to have been written in our mother tongue. It is a calendar which we can consult every day in the year, and for every day of the year find some bright motto, some gentle speech, some anticipative gospel.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, surely thou hast laid up for us in thy law a store of good things: give us the hearing ear, the seeing eye, the understanding heart, that none of thy treasures be wasted upon us. We have heard the words of the wise, and behold they are as nails fastened in a sure place: may we receive the same and order our life according to them, that being found in the way of wisdom we may also walk in the paths of pleasantness and find enjoyment and peace as we advance from step to step. We have heard also the words of thy dear Son, our only Saviour: we beseech thee to make a highway to our feet for the progress of his kingdom, that it may be set up there in all its grandeur, strength, and infinite graciousness and beauty. May we be the subjects of his crown, citizens of his kingdom, followers of his captaincy, and may the royalty of his strength and grace rule us with a sweet and welcome compulsion. We rejoice that, though he was equal with the Father, he was found in fashion as a man; and being found in fashion as a man, he opened his mouth in parables and revealed the ancient secrets, and set up the kingdom of heaven upon the earth. We bless thee for its largeness; we thank thee that we all may find a place within the enclosure of thy sanctuary; may none be left outside, may the citizenship of heaven include every one of us—so shall there be in our heart a spring of joy which can never fail.

Great are the riches of thy house, and wondrous the lights which play upon our life as we wait upon thee in the sanctuary. We see afar, we are no longer bounded by things visible, we are not prisoners of time and space, we are called by an emancipating voice into infinite liberty—yea, the freedom of thy children is glorious freedom—enable us to walk in it, without licence, enjoying thy revelations, living upon thy grace, eating thy word with a devouring appetite, and finding all our strength and rest and deep content in thy holy word.

We have come to bless thee for all thy care: we will not restrain our speech before thee, but let our hearts run out after thy mercy in grateful and ardent appreciation. Pardon all our sin. If our sin is great thy grace is greater, and thou dost not grudgingly but abundantly pardon. Thou wilt magnify the Cross in our forgiveness; yea, thou wilt make glad the heart of Christ by the overflowing pardon with which thou wilt answer our cry for pity and release. Chasten the strong, encourage the weak, sanctify those of us who are struggling after better experience; save the young from temptation, and by the way of the Cross do thou bring us all to thy dwelling-place on high, even to thy holy Jerusalem, whose streets are of pure gold, the gates whereof shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. Amen.

Psalm i.

[**NOTE.**—This is regarded as a concise introduction to a limited Psalter, and not as the introduction to the whole Book of Psalms. The authorship of the psalm is uncertain. In some MSS. it is regarded simply as a preface, and in others it is connected with the second psalm. According to some MSS., in Acts xiii. 33, the second psalm is quoted as the first. Some peculiarities of language, as well as the general tone of thought, are considered to point to Solomon as the author, whilst some words seem to bring it to a later period than David's. Probably it was written before the disruption of Israel, or at least before the decadence of the kingdom of Judah.]

1. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

4. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

5. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

THE TREES OF GOD.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (ver. 1).

WE might suppose that this statement, both on the one side and on the other, amounted to nothing more than a mere assertion of individual opinion. It might be imagined, on a superficial examination of the circumstances, that some man had ventured to give it as his opinion that the godly man would be blessed, and that the ungodly man would fail of blessing. This is not matter of opinion; this is matter of law, matter of historical necessity. Moreover, the statement—if it be only a statement—is open to immediate contradiction if it be not confirmed and illustrated by the history of mankind. This gives us a very solid standing-ground in our study. Opinion is free, and opinion cannot raise itself above the line of discussion; it must always be subject to criticism and to controversy. But this is not matter of mere opinion; this is the result of the inductive

process, this is the outcome of law, this is the upgathering of vast and minute experience. If it is not that, how easy the contradiction ! how tempting the field of action, in which an infant may become a soldier, and the man of feeble speech may overwhelm with the evidence of fact all the sophisms of the most eloquent orator ! Thus we are upon very solid ground. If the first psalm is not true, every one amongst us can disprove it. The appeal is to life, to fact, to actual circumstance and condition. The ungodly man, therefore, may stand up and say—not in the individual instance or within narrow lines, but literally the ungodly humanity may stand up and say,—The first psalm is a lie : I am happy, I am blessed ; I am ungodly, and yet I thrive, in the best sense of the term ; I fear not God, I regard not man, I am the centre of my own movement, I supply the motives of my own action, I give account only at the door of my own understanding and conscience, and I enjoy eternal midsummer in the soul : nature is to me one crystal beauty, one sparkling delight, one sufficing benediction ; I know not God, and I am perfectly happy. If one ungodly man were foolish enough to make that speech, ten thousand of his race would instantly rise to modify his statement, if not positively to contradict it. The godly man will make his speech on the other side ; he will not fail of emphasis, he will have no modification or reservation, but will say broadly, with sacred unction and telling firmness of tone,—The first psalm is a truth ; I have in some measure lived it, proved it, illustrated it : loving God, I am happy ; living in God, I am safe ; obeying God, I am at rest ; any failure in result is traceable to failure in process. The first psalm, therefore, in its substance, meaning, purport, is a holy and incontrovertible declaration. We should look upon all the Scriptures from this point of view. The Scriptures are not filled with opinions. We may frankly admit that sometimes the mere construction of the sentence might suggest that an opinion was being adventured ; but, as a matter of fact, there are no opinions in the Bible. The Bible, in its doctrines, is a book of facts. Everything that is theological in the Bible is first scientific, historical, actual. When the Scriptural writers talk about “the law of the Lord,” they speak about something they have been watching a long time : they have seen one instance, and have wondered if another

instance like it would occur; the second instance has transpired, and a third, and a twentieth, and a hundredth instance of the kind, and again another hundredth; and as the instances have multiplied themselves in such continuity and confirmatory succession, the watchers have said,—This is a law; and when they have written out what appears to be a matter of mere opinion, they have in reality set down with a steady hand the result of a lifetime of observation, confirmed by the experience of innumerable generations. The Book of Proverbs is not a book of opinions. When a proverb is written down a history is written down. We open the Book of Proverbs, and we find this sentence: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” That is not a matter of opinion, a matter of sentiment,—some man’s conjecture about something he does not really understand. “Wine is a mocker,”—that is history; “strong drink is raging,”—that is a fact; “whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise,”—a million hands are uplifted to carry the vote, and there is no reply. Open the Book of Proverbs where we may, we shall find that we are not reading an opinion in reading a proverb inspired. Here is one: “A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.” Why, it could be contradicted instantly if it were not true; but humanity stands up and says,—Whoever told you that, told you in a sentence the history of innumerable broken hearts. So with all the Scriptures. If we suppose that in the Bible we have simply matters of opinion, then we are bound to controvert them, examine them, subject them to critical analysis to find out how much, if any, truth there is in them. If the text-book were a mere collection of miscellaneous opinions it would be useless to the preacher. When he opens the Bible he opens what is termed the law. He confirms it, or he could not preach it; his hearers confirm it, or they could not listen to it. Mere opinions would either divert or distract the mind, would vex and torment the intellect; but words that come with the massiveness and the solemnity of history, and gather themselves up into all the sternness of actual law, come with a force which for the moment we may resist, but which in the long run we must accept. All these general observations we establish by the testimony and illustrate by the spirit of this first psalm. Let

us read the word : the very reading of it may be an argument ; it may compel such a tone in the very enunciation of it as shall itself accomplish all the work of formal reasoning.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful But his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night " (vers. 1, 2).

What say you ? Do you write a negative verdict over the face of that decision ? Is there a man who loves the darkness, serves the devil, pants for hell, who could deny that,—a man so lost that he could deny the opening verses of the first psalm ? We cannot tell what they feel who have gone over the brink and fallen into the fire and the brimstone, by which future punishment is at all events symbolised to our dull imagination ; but one instance is given in parable from which large inferences may be drawn. The man who was tormented in the flames said : I have five brethren—send to them ; keep them out of this place, save them if it be possible ! That was a parable, but it finds an answer in every human consciousness. The father says when he is most lost,—Spare my child the sight of this shame ! do not let my son follow my example ! I have wasted my substance with riotous living—may no child of mine follow his father's evil example ! That we have heard from human lips ; that we have not read in some Jewish book five thousand years old : it is written in the journals of the day ; it is to be met in the groans that rise from unhappy civilization at this moment ; it is the testimony of humanity. What can the ungodly, the sinner, or the scornful have by way of blessing ? Their position is a negative one, or a position of resistance ; and their spirit is a spirit of blasphemousness and flippancy. There is no rest in blasphemy ; there is no contentment in flippancy. The scorner is no friend of good men. Any man who could indulge a sneer at the Bible is a bad man. We can imagine men who have great intellectual difficulties and literary difficulties of many kinds reverently closing the old book and saying nothing more about it—being dumb evermore ; but the man who can turn the Bible into a subject for jesting and foolish speaking and sneering is in his heart bad. He may pay twenty shillings in the pound, he may have amongst citizens a good

and honest name ; but if he can sneer at the book which is the corner-stone of our best life, that sneer makes him a base man, and he will break down at some point and reveal himself as a child of the devil. We are not referring to intellectual doubt—of real earnest difficulty ; nor to those who are really anxious to have certain great questions solved ; we refer only to the scornful, the sneering, the jibing,—those who turn sacred mysteries into occasions of trifling ; those who sneer at the little child on bent knees, with clasped hands, and with eyes that look up to the motherly heavens ;—it is of the man belonging to that class we speak, and speak solemnly, with tears in the heart, and without bitterness or resentment ; and in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, whom we adore as one God, we pronounce him to be a bad man. Appearances shall not deceive us ; occasional tones in the voice shall not divert the concentration of our inquiry and our judgment,—he is a bad man. The drunkard may be nearer heaven's kingdom than he can ever be : he has blasphemed against the Holy Ghost.

But the "blessed man" not only avoids and abandons, as it were with horror, the ungodly, the sinful, and the scornful ;—that is the negative aspect of the case. What is the affirmative ? We find that in the second verse : "His delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." We must have positive sustenance. It is not enough to shut up the bad book—we must have the good book in its place ; it is not enough to desist from eating bad food—we must have the pure and honest bread to eat ; it is not enough to abandon the seat of the scornful ; it is not enough to give up drinking and to long for it all the time, because then in our very longing we may be a kind of drunkard still : we must be filled with the Spirit of God—dispossession followed by possession ; liberation followed by inspiration,—the outcast devil finding his place occupied when he returns to reconquer his victim. Why have we such incertitude in Christian persuasion and such inconstancy in Christian life ? Because we have lost the Bible. We do not read it : we glance at it ; we read a verse or a paragraph now and then, but we do not eat it—devour it—consume it. We

have Bibles: we ourselves should *be* Bibles. Let the word of God dwell in you richly—"it is written": yes, and "it is written again," and yet "again." Who really knows the law of the Lord? Who meditates in it day and night? Who so does is a blessed man: he eats at the king's table, he listens to the king's music, he lives in the king's light. It matters not that we may be able to quote large portions of the Bible—for it is just possible that a man may recite the entire record from the first chapter of Genesis to the Amen of the Apocalypse, and know nothing about the Bible. We must get at the Bible that is *in* the Bible—at the music that is in the notes; there stand the black and white notes: we know the name of each, we know the duration of each in music-time, we can speak learnedly about the notes; but where is the music itself—the singing in the soul—the resonance which only the spirit can hear? Where the all-spiritual realisation of the thought? It is not enough to be chapter-and-verse readers; it is not enough to be happy and rich in literal quotation; these gifts of memory we do not despise, we would rather covet them; but apart from the spiritual perception of meanings they are worse than useless. The Bible is not a text, the Bible is not a chapter, the Bible is not a book of chapters; the Bible is a revelation. And where does a revelation begin?—where human nature begins. Where does a revelation end?—where Melchisedek ended. What is the measure of a revelation?—it has none. Is it a fixed quantity?—yes, as infinity is a fixed quantity. Does it acquire the weariness of a long monotony?—never! What is it, then?—a continual surprise. A man says, when you take him out upon a dull grey day to look at the landscape, and you tell him that he really cannot see it now, that he can imagine the light playing upon it,—*no!* no man can imagine light. Could the sun at the moment of the man's supposed imagining break forth from behind the cold grey cloud and leap upon the landscape, making it gleam and sparkle and awakening all the silent birds, then the man would find that his imagination was not equal to the mystery of God. So the Bible, being a revelation, is a continual surprise. It brightens upon the mind, charms the fancy; it satisfies all the innermost desires of the spirit; it fills the soul with sweet content;—a

surprise every morning, a benediction every night. It is impossible for me to convey any sense adequate to the occasion of the manner in which the book of God grows upon me every year of my life. It is my best friend. Would that I could tell you all it tells me! Would that some arrangement could be made by which a preacher could instantaneously summon his audience and preach when the fire stings him and all the angels stir him into the passion for preaching! Oh that men would simply make the law of the Lord their delight, and meditate in it day and night! What preaching we should have then! A word would be a sermon; a sermon would be a library; one hint would start the mind upon infinite ranges of thought and contemplation. A prepared pew would make a prepared pulpit; but a prepared pulpit can never make a prepared pew. Given an audience, earnest, longing, impatient of all process and detail, and then one spark—one little spark—falling on the prepared material, behold, the answer of the people would be as the blaze of an altar-fire, rising instantly to the great, watching, healing heavens! You cannot disturb permanently the man who is rooted in Biblical doctrine and Biblical thought. Many a man supposes that when he shakes a tree he is shaking the root. Sometimes it appears as if the wind would tear up the deep roots of the great trees. It is not so in all instances. The root is deeper than the strength of the wind can reach. What is true in many instances in the forest is true in many instances in the Church: if our roots are deep-struck into divine soil, we may be shaken: the branches may creak, a few leaves will be blown off—ay, a few twigs may be splintered and shivered; but the tree—the great life-tree—is safe at the root, because the root is hidden in the wisdom and protected by the eternity of the living God.

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (ver. 3).

A man's life should be rooted in God—in God's law, in God's service. It should not be as a flower plucked, but as a flower unplucked, growing in the eternal stream. Where God is there is no famine. A life severed from God's law cannot grow,

cannot be at rest; it will be the victim of circumstances, affrighted by surprises, and disquieted by many fears. The good man—the student and servant of God's law—is not only like a tree, he is like a tree planted by rivers of water. So long as the rivers run his roots are nourished; he lives in the great scheme and system of things; no vagrant is he, but a citizen and a householder. His likeness unto a tree planted by the rivers of water is full of suggestion: a tree is permanent, fruitful, beautiful; its branches are for refreshment, and its shadow for rest; it answers the sun and rain; it waits for God, and puts forth its life at his bidding. Notice the word “prosper”: that word is used in no mean or narrow sense, but refers to a prosperity that is real, ultimate, and unchangeable. If we say that the good man does not always prosper, we may say the same thing in effect about God himself. The good man prospers as God prospers. God complains that his law is slighted and his word disobeyed; yet he says that his law shall be set up in the earth, and that his word shall not return unto him void. Some adversities are temporary; they may indeed be part of a process; as truly as God prospers will the good man prosper,—their purposes are identical. The circumstances which suggest that the good man's prosperity is uncertain are like the hills and valleys which suggest to our limited vision that the earth cannot be a globe. We know, however, that all the hills and valleys fall under a higher law, an infinite astronomy. We have just said that where God is there is no famine. These words may be taken in their widest sense, as relating to the intellect, the imagination, and every faculty which belongs to manhood. When there is no bread in the field, yet is there a great feast in the heart. When the fig-tree ceases to bear, the hunger of the soul is satisfied with fruit from the tree of life. Jesus Christ said he had bread to eat that the world knew not of. He laid down the greatest possible doctrine of the sustenance of man when he said: “Man shall not live by bread alone,”—God has a thousand ways of sustaining life: every word which proceedeth out of his mouth is a living word and a way of life to those who receive it. Thus in the deepest sense of the words we live and move and have our being in God; not a limited and stunted being, starved and hungered because of the sparseness of God's bounty, but a

being as enduring as his own, and made secure by all the resources of his throne and Godhead.

A very practical lesson arises from the words "bringeth forth his fruit in his season." We are not to look even in Christian life for what is ordinarily understood by "fruit" all the year round. Upon this point many Christians disquiet themselves unnecessarily. There is a time for rest, for recritual; and time spent in legitimate sleep is time made for larger and harder work. Let the tree be the symbol and image of our life. It has its season of fruitlessness, but not of fruitlessness in any blameworthy sense. The tree is part of the great course of things—a speck in an infinite system—and it keeps all the time and law of the stupendous universe. So it is with the Christian heart. There are times of abundant labour, of almost excessive joy, of hope above the brightness of the sun, and of realisations which transform the earth into heaven: there are times when our energy seems to be more than equal to all the exigencies of life: we can work without weariness, we can suffer without complaining; we are quite sure that the morning draweth nigh, and that in the end the victory will be with God. At other times there are seasons of depression, almost intolerable weariness, somewhat indeed of sickness of heart, as if a great pain had fixed itself within us; at other times we know that we are not bringing forth fruit to the glory of God or for the use of man, and in such times we call ourselves cumberers of the ground, and urge our idleness against ourselves with all the force of a criminal accusation. The Christian should deal with himself reasonably in all these things. The year is not one season, nor is human life one monotonous experience. A tree may be by the rivers of water, and may be planted even by the hand of God himself, and yet there will be portions of the year when not a leaf can be seen on its branches, and when no fruit is offered to the hunger of man. We are not to be judged by this or that one day or season, but by the whole scope and circumference of life. As to the promise "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper," we come upon unwritten but inevitable assumptions and conditions. The character is the guarantee of the action. Read by itself, "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" is marked by an apparent wildness, as if it would be impossible for a man

to attempt anything that would not be instantly turned in the direction of his wishes. It is our reading, however, that would be wild, not the inspired words that would be without licence ; we must remember that a certain quality of character is described in the psalm. The portrait is that of a "man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful ;" but whose "delight is in the law of the Lord," and in his law doth this man "meditate day and night ;" we are therefore first of all to fix our attention upon the quality of the character described, and then we are to read "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper : " such a man cannot do anything wilfully wrong ; such a man cannot tempt the providence of God ; such a man cannot project himself into his plans so far as to exclude the general welfare and the honour of the divine throne ; such a man is all but identical with God in thought and purpose and love, and therefore his personal prosperity is as secured as is the prosperity of every divine principle and purpose.

"The ungodly are not so : but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (ver. 4).

Who can gather again the chaff which has been driven away ? Where is it ? whose is it ? who will claim it ? who will buy it ? who will care for it ? But there are appearances to the contrary. Some ungodly men seem to be well-established : they have property, they have influence, their eyes stand out with fatness ; they have more than heart can wish. What are we to make of such circumstances and realities, for realities they certainly appear to be to the casual observer ? We are to remember that appearance is one thing, and reality is another. At a little distance the chaff might be mistaken for wheat. We are to remember also that the Bible itself recognises what we mistake for realities : comments upon them, explains them, and makes them of no account in the measurement and valuation of God's providence. The prosperity of the wicked has never escaped the attention of good men ; it has made some of them stumble ; it has been turned into an argument against a discriminating providence ; nay, more, it has been used as an illustration to prove that if God is more than usually mindful of

any of his creatures, he seems to have set the seal of his special approbation upon men of worldly mind. Here we are thrown back upon the quality of character. We must make the well-known distinction between character and reputation. Character is what a man really is in his very heart and thought ; reputation is what the man is thought to be by those who are associated with him, or who observe his method of life, or estimate the success which may have attended his labours. The distinction between the godly and the ungodly must be vital. Such is the distinction between wheat and chaff ; in wheat there are harvests for generations through all time, in chaff there is nothing but emptiness and rottenness. We do not always discover quality by a superficial inspection. Character must be put to the severest tests before its real value can be ascertained. We cannot regard painted ships as of any value for purposes of navigation. Not what a horse is upon the artist's canvas, but what he is on the battle-field, must be the standard of value. Not in form but in power must be the continual rule of criticism and judgment. There may be a beauty of form without any beauty of inspiration ; all merely formal beauty becomes monotonous and oppressive ; it is the light within that makes day ; it is the inspiration of the understanding that gives men clear discernment of the times and distinct mastery of events. The wheat and the chaff come very near to one another ; they may at a little distance be mistaken one for the other. But every man's character should be tried ; every man's work shall have the test of fire applied to it ; and not until such final tests have been applied can we really tell, in some instances, which is good and which is bad. Driven by the wind, carried here and there, without soul or force of their own ; —to know whose they are we must know where the wind is—the wind of popularity, the wind of success, the wind of divine visitation. What mocking words are applied to the ungodly man ! The Bible everywhere treats him with contempt. It sees him in great power, spreading himself like a green bay tree, and then it declares that he cannot be found, yea though he be searched for in the soil where he grew, not a fibre of his roots can be discovered. The life of the hypocrite is described as a candle which has to be blown out, and which shall leave only an intolerable odour behind. The bad man's house is represented

as founded upon the sand, and its doom is foretold. Never do we find anything of solidity, real value, or true praise connected with the bad man's name in all the Biblical record. Nor is this a merely metaphysical criticism on the part of the Bible; we know it of our own observation and experience to be a true judgment of fact. Who would employ a man who was known to be really bad at heart? Who would rely upon him? Who would trust him with property? Who would consult him in perplexity? The bad man may be used for temporary purposes: he may be turned into a mere convenience, but even the men who use him despise him, and as soon as the purposes of convenience have been completed the instrument is thrown away. The ungodly man can have no true friends. Though he form truces with his associates and enter into covenants signed and sealed and marked by all the appearance of solidity they will be as nothing in the day of temptation and trial. Ungodliness cannot stand; it has no virtue, strength, or pith; it is the creature of circumstances; **it is an accident of the weather; it is driven about by the wind.**

"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" (ver. 5).

These are the true and final tests of character. Put into the hands of a sower a handful of chaff and a handful of wheat, and can the former "stand" in his judgment? Mark, there is a judgment! There is a congregation of the righteous! At present judgment is partial and uncertain, and at present society is mixed; but the time of judgment and separation is coming! Man soon comes to the end of his probation. Where are the ungodly of the last generation? What impression is produced by the recollection of their names,—a recollection of self-will, self-indulgence, self-promotion; not a recollection of purity, wisdom, sympathy, or noble service? Words of this kind show that society is organised by its Creator, and is not left in tumultuousness, without order, direction, or final outcome. The words "judgment" and "congregation" point to conditions of an ultimate kind. Regard life as chaotic, without law, order, or purpose, and then verily the race will be to the swift and the battle to the strong. Everything depends upon the point of view from which

life is surveyed. To the man who is without God in the world life is a scramble, or a series of chances, or a mere department of gambling, no one knowing who may be first to-morrow or who may win in the impending contest: principles go for nothing; convictions are laughed at; prayer is despised. But has history justified this view of life? Has our own personal history justified it? The answer is instantaneous, emphatic, and complete. Appearances notwithstanding, it is still clear to the observing mind that human history has shape, direction, and purpose; it is a marvellous unity; its very complexity cannot destroy its order; at the heart of things there is a thought, a determination, a divine decree. Taking, therefore, this view of the case, we see the high and solid reasoning of the text,—“Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” This outcome is noted as a simple sequence. It is not an arbitrary arrangement or a penalty inflicted without a cause; it is the logical outcome of certain moral processes; evil leads to disappointment, misery, and perdition;—good leads to satisfaction, enjoyment, and heaven. If this were the voice of the Bible only men might quibble about it and propose certain difficult questions in relation to it; but we see the outworking of this law in social life, and are prepared to confirm it according to the variety and extent of our own experience. Let us not regard words of this kind merely as petty warnings or as having in them any tone of vindictiveness, as if God simply by the exercise of his almightiness determined to have his own way at last. This is not a question of mere power at all. It is a question of moral force, moral quality, and moral triumph. Written all over the universe in every department of nature and providence and revelation is the sublime law that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,—not an arbitrary division of classes, but a philosophical, moral, and sublime realisation of the mysterious processes which are known by the names of cause and effect.

“For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (ver. 6).

The question is not whether the righteous is apparently stronger than the ungodly, but what is the relation of the Lord to them

both? The final award is not with man but with God. The destiny of the righteous and the ungodly is as distinct as their characters. There is no blending of one into the other,—the one lives, the other perishes. Consistently throughout the Bible life is always associated with obedience or righteousness, and death with disobedience or unrighteousness. Upon this point the Bible bears no equivocal or doubtful testimony. The voice of the Lord is one from the beginning to the end of his testimony. Great value attaches to a consistency of this kind. Consider that the records of the Bible extend over thousands of years and relate to every variety of human disposition and social circumstance; consider further that the Bible is the joint production of numerous writers who in many cases knew nothing of what the others had written, and then remember that from beginning to end the face of the Lord is represented as set against evil, and shining like a benediction upon good; and say if there be not in this very consistency itself, at least the beginning or suggestion of a noble argument. The consistency has a bearing upon the character of God himself. It is because he never changes in his own moral quality that he never changes in relation to the actions of men. In his first interview with man he spoke of life and death; in the final judgment of the world life and death will be the two categories under which the human race will be classified. That “the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous” is the good man’s supreme comfort. “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” At first it might appear as if the knowledge of the Lord were a terror to the good man, whereas, on the contrary, it is the noblest comfort which sustains him. Not that the good man challenges the divine scrutiny in the matter of his actions, but that he is able to invite the Lord to look into the secret purpose of his heart and understand what is the supreme wish of his life. The Apostle Peter represents this truth in a manner most pathetic: “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Peter was not here calling attention to his personal life, which was full of blunder and of shame, but was calling attention to the one purpose and uppermost desire of his life. That is a consolation always open to the good man. To know that the motive is right is to know that the end must be good. “When my spirit was

overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path." "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." The Apostle Paul has a noble figure upon this matter:—"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." The prophet Nahum bears testimony to this great truth, saying, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." What we have to be supremely anxious about is the main purpose or desire of life; that being right, actions will adjust themselves accordingly, and, notwithstanding innumerable mistakes, the substance of the character shall be good, and a crown of glory shall be granted to the faithful servant.

The whole of this psalm suggests many inquiries of a practical kind. First of all, are we blessed? The psalm relates to the blessedness of a peculiar character, and we are entitled to ask how far we correspond to its lineaments. We may be blessed in many ways, and must be blessed in all if we follow the way that is divine. We know what it is to be blessed in human relations by associating ourselves with those who are of the right spirit and purpose. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." This is the law of blessing and destruction. To walk with God is to move constantly in an upward and heavenly direction. Another question which we may put is, Do we distinguish between blessedness and transient happiness? There is a great difficulty in this direction. We are so much the creatures of circumstances that we may interpret momentary emotions as indicative of solidity of character. Blessedness is a question of moral rectitude and not a question of transient emotions. Being right we shall of necessity be blessed. Instead, therefore, of looking for the effect, let us steadfastly fix our minds upon the cause, knowing that it is impossible to have happiness from the outside, and that all blessedness expresses an inward and spiritual condition. We may well interrogate ourselves further in the matter of our own fruitfulness. What is the kind of fruit which we bring forth? What are our actions? How are our words regarded by those who are walking in darkness or are inquiring for the solution of great problems? "Say

ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him : for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." The root being right, the fruit shall be good. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Are we to be compared to the worthless chaff? We need not shrink from the question as if it could not be answered, for we well know that the reply is in our own hearts. Pitiabie is the life of the ungodly. They are as stubble before the wind and as chaff that the storm carrieth away. Christ, the Saviour of the world, will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. However much appearances may be on the side of those who are ungodly, we read concerning them that "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof;" it is a momentary satisfaction, which perishes in the using. Whom God calls blessed can never be desolate; whom God calls cursed can never know true joy. Let us set it down as a fact in life, as a standard of judgment, that it is impossible for us to alter moral qualities and moral issues; we are called upon to accept the moral constitution of the universe as God has appointed it, to work out its laws, and either by obedience to enter into its heaven, or by disobedience to be flung away as sons of perdition.

Psalm 11.

[NOTE.—Jerusalem appears to be threatened by hostile powers, a confederacy that took advantage of the succession of a young and inexperienced monarch, to throw off the bonds of subjection and tribute. David, Solomon, Ahaz, and Uzziah have each of them been regarded as the hero and theme of the poem, but not one name satisfies the conditions of the psalm. Probably the psalm expresses an ideal view of the future. The psalm is lyric. It is based on the words of Nathan, and is referred historically to the time of the coronation of Solomon. The ancient Jewish commentators unanimously describe the Messianic interpretation of this psalm as a common one. Modern Jewish commentators interpret the song of David exclusively. In Acts iv. 25 the psalm is referred to as Messianic; in Acts xiii. 33, verse 7 is referred to as accomplished in the resurrection; and in Heb. i. 5 it is regarded as intimating Christ's proper divinity. No doubt is entertained by the closest investigators, that in early days before the Christian era the psalm was regarded as Messianic. It has been attempted to explain it in reference to David, Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Maccabees; but the whole scope of the psalm is too vast for any such limitation. The early Christians ascribed the psalm to David. Some critics of authority attribute it to Solomon, some to Hezekiah, some to Isaiah, or his times.]

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (vers. 1-3).

WHY do the heathen rage? Because they are the heathen. The explanation of an action is to be found in character. The heathen, understanding by that term all lawless and unorganised communities, or communities uninspired by the spirit of reverence and justice, are without religious intelligence, sobriety, self-control; therefore they "rage"—literally, they bluster, and they foolishly suppose that noise is power. Thus the explanation of all things of a human kind is to be found in the quality of human character. No solidity of character means excitement, restlessness, fury, aimless striking, and irrational procedure altogether.

Why do the people imagine a vain thing? Because they are the people; that is to say, they are a crowd, a multitude, a mob; they do not move from a social centre; they are the victims and sport of any passion that may be uppermost at the moment. The idea of social or united responsibility does not enter into their thinking, and, therefore, does not regulate their action. Mere numbers do not constitute society: men may be in association and yet not in fellowship. What is wanted is organisation, legal, moral, and sympathetic; such organisation alone constitutes "the people" in the Christian and even truly philosophic sense of the term.

But why do the kings and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord? Because they are kings and rulers; that is to say, they do not know that all governments are inferior and subordinate to spiritual and divine dominion; they resent every suggestion of the sort; they have all the pettiness but none of the genius of rulership; they do not know that rulership ought to come up out of the spirit of obedience, and, therefore, that he who cannot obey, cannot rule. Their notion of rulership is that of "directing" and "casting away"; it is destructive, negative, ruthless. The very terms they use indicate their conception of sovereignty. They do not say, Let us examine; they say, Let us break; not, Let us argue, but, Let us cast away! And this spirit comes out of a false notion of divine government; they designate that government by two expressive terms—namely, "bands" and "cords"; they think that the Lord's government is tyranny and slavery; to them it is not a spiritual dominion of thought, rectitude, sympathy, culture, discipline; but a dominion of bands and cords,—that is, of merely physical and tyrannous strength. Such is the course of thinking adopted by rude and selfish ignorance, it means tyranny, usurpation, and is utterly destitute of beneficence and moral grandeur. There are no greater names in social language than "kings" and "rulers," nor is there any occasion to change the names; the great thing to be done is to purge them of all injurious and unholy elements; the words "the people" must remain for ever as conveying a significance peculiarly their own; but instead of these words representing mere mobs or masses or uncontrollable multitudes,

they must represent organised communities based on the principle of mutual responsibility and common welfare.

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh : the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (vers. 4, 5).

The heathen and the people, the kings and the rulers, are answered with contempt, they are laughed at and derided ; and if this be not enough to change their spirit and their purpose they will be spoken to in wrath and vexed in sore displeasure. It is interesting and instructive to remark how creation first laughs at and derides men who oppose it, and how in the next place it avenges the insults which are offered to its laws. When Canute rebuked the waves the sea laughed at him and the waves had him in derision ; had he remained upon the position which he had chosen, laughter and derision would have been exchanged for vengeance and overthrow. Let a man attempt to put down the wind, and the only possible answer is derision ; let him attempt to defy the lightning, and he may perish under its stroke. There is but a short distance between the derisiveness of nature and its penal judgments. So every attempt to revile the power of God is contemned, and every insult offered to his holiness is avenged. A very curious process is indicated by these two verses. The laughter is expressive of an eternal law ; things are not so constituted that they can be turned about at the pleasure of the wicked, nor is the purpose of the universe so fickle that the wrath of man can affect its fulfilment ; great strength can afford to deride ; infinite power can best express its own consciousness of almightiness by smiling upon all the hosts which array themselves against it. But this answer of contemptuous laughter must not be the only reply, for contempt can seldom have any moral issue of a really substantial and blessed kind ; there must come a time when law must avenge itself upon those who would insult its majesty or mock its power. First, laughter as a proof of the utter impossibility of injuriously affecting the standards and purposes of God ; after laughter must come the judgment, which shows how dangerous it is to trifle with fire, and how awful a thing it is to defy the wrath of righteousness. It is for every man to consider under what particular phase of the divine regard he is now living. For a period he may be amused,

as it were, at certain phases of the opposition of nature or the awkwardness of life; but let him not suppose that he sees the whole of the case: such opposition and awkwardness may suddenly be displaced by judgment and vengeance and destiny irrevocable.

A very beautiful expression is found in the sixth verse:—
“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” There is but one king, and he is throned upon a hill that is beyond all other characteristics holy. Mark how the moral is associated with the royal in this picture of divine sovereignty. A throne that is set upon any other hill than a hill that is holy must fall because of want of solid and enduring foundation. Assured that the hill is holy, we may comfort ourselves with the further assurance that every sovereignty founded upon it is also holy. The kings of the earth had forgotten the King of Zion, and the rulers made by rude strength of their own had forgotten that all true rulership is but a phase of heaven’s eternal sway. What is the reason why masters should rule their households well? because they have to remember that they themselves have a master. So kings are to reign under the King, and power is to be established upon holiness. Any king who supposes himself to be final must of necessity become a tyrant, because final authority is inconsistent with limited wisdom and restricted power. Finality can only belong to completeness. Kings should never cease to pray. This applies not only to kingships of a political or imperial kind, but to sovereignties of a spiritual, moral, and social degree. There is a temptation to believe that kingship is equivalent to deity; in other words, that the man who is upon the throne has no need to live upon any higher life than his own. This is a fatal error into whatever lines of thinking it may enter. The more gifted the mind, the more incessant should be its religious desires, that it may be kept in the right course, upheld amid all the temptations incident to ascendancy, and chastened daily by still deeper insight into the frailty of human nature and the uncertainty of all earthly or finite tenures. In this sense the father has, so to say, more need to pray than has the child. In a sense he is both father and child, having to think for both, and plan the life of both, and concern himself with

the most solemn aspects of the destiny of both. The pastor's prayer should be coloured by the necessity and the desire of the thousand hearts that look to him for the utterance of common necessities.

"I will declare the decree : the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron ; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (vers. 7-9).

There is nothing in the economy of life and civilisation that is haphazard. Before all things and round about them as a glory and defence is the Lord's "decree." Under all disorder is law. That law is first beneficent and then retributive ; it is beneficent because it contemplates the recovery and sanctification of the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth ; it is retributive because if this offer of enclosure and honour is rejected, those who despise it shall be broken with a rod of iron and dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel. In a study of the world's constitution and movement, look first of all at the Lord's decree, in other words, at the Lord's idea and purpose. Settle it that the decree is good, merciful, redemptive, and then judge everything in the light of that fact. If we were judging of a national constitution, we should not pronounce it bad because of its prisons ; we should, on the contrary, pronounce it good for that very reason. We should know that there was a strong authority in the land, and that the authority was good because it imprisoned and rebuked the workers of evil. So the rod of iron attests the holiness of God ; and hell itself shows that virtue is honoured of heaven. Whatever may be the intermediate interpretation of these words, it is the joy of the Christian to find their full fruition in the advent and priesthood of Jesus Christ. Sometimes long periods are required for the full interpretation of ancient terms. We read these terms with wonder ; sometimes we invent momentarily satisfactory interpretations of them ; we may even go so far as to build orthodoxies upon certain meanings which we attribute to them ; but as the ages come and go and new phases of human nature and divine purpose are disclosed we begin to see fuller, if not final meanings, and according to our enlarging light should be the expansiveness of our judgment and

charity. No birth in human history known to us so completely covers these terms with glory and beneficence as does the birth of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Not even in the New Testament have these words been excelled for dignity and spiritual richness. Here is law as if eternity itself had spoken : here is divine consultation resembling the conference between the persons of the Godhead reported in the earliest books of Scripture : here is the creation of a new term—"Son," and a new relation as between God and the new humanity : no longer do we read of Creator and creature, but of Father and Son : here is sublime prophecy,—the heathen are turned into Christ's inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth are filled with the summer of his love. The awful words of the ninth verse do not refer to the people as such, but to the people in their heathen capacity ; it is heathenism that is to be broken with a rod of iron ; it is heathenism that is to be dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. Even if the words be taken to apply to the people in the ordinary sense of the term, they can only be so applied when the people set themselves stubbornly against the will of the Almighty. The clear and beneficent teaching of the passage is that there can be but one God, one sovereign power, one eternal righteousness, and that whatsoever sets itself against this one rulership must inevitably be broken and dashed in pieces.

"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings : be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (vers. 10-12).

The threatening of Jehovah is neither an empty taunt nor a lawless passion. When he speaks of breaking the wicked with a rod of iron and dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel, he is not to be compared with the kings and rulers who said "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." God's threatening has a moral purpose in view, which is to turn the kings to wisdom and the judges to instruction : his threatening is indeed an aspect of his gospel. When the parent threatens the child it is not for the child's injury but for the child's welfare. We do wrong in stopping at the threatening and overlooking the purpose. Our business is rather to look steadfastly at the purpose of God and to believe that all the methods

which he adopts for its accomplishment are wise and good and best. Having shown the wicked how terrible he can be—how easy it would be for him to break them and dash them in pieces—he calls upon them to serve to him, kiss the Son, and to enjoy the blessedness of them that put their trust in him. The Lord is not willing that any should perish. Judgment is his strange work. Christ will either have men as an inheritance, or he will have them as vessels which are fit only to be dashed to pieces. Those who scorn his grace shall perish by his power. A very vivid illustration of the method of divine providence is supplied by these verses. Here is, for example, warning; warning is succeeded by threatening; warning and threatening are both succeeded by an offer of reconciliation and peace and joy. We do not find in these verses mere denunciation or mere threatening; we find denunciation and threatening employed for the purpose of awakening attention to an offered gospel; the consequences of sin are set forth in appalling terms, and the method of reconciliation is indicated with definiteness that cannot be mistaken. “Kiss the Son,”—wonderful words are these; they mean obeisance, confession of error, willingness to serve, acknowledgment of divine supremacy. This is the kiss of peace, it is indeed the holy kiss, it has in it all the meaning of heaven. The words can be understood better by the heart than by the head. They point to a happy reconciliation, the humble acceptance of divinely-tendered terms and the rest which comes of obedience. “When his wrath is kindled but a little,”—this is the purpose of the divine wrath, to show what it can do, and yet to awaken in the sinner a feeling that even this wrath may be escaped by a method of God’s own invention. Whatever we see of divine wrath now may be described as “but a little.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Do not let us delude ourselves with the sophism that we understand all that is meant by the punishment of sin. Verily it is an everlasting punishment! Its duration is the smallest of all the elements that enter into it. It is not at all an arithmetical quantity. The fearfulness of falling into the divine hands must be left amongst the terms which cannot be explained by human speech, and must be so understood as to subdue the heart and lead the rebellious will to the acceptance of divine terms.

Observe that in this psalm the kings and the rulers, the heathen and the people, are all addressed in a common language. There is not one way for kings and rulers and another way for the common people. Sin is one in all cases, essentially and unchangeably. Let us notice specially the folly of those who ought to know better—kings and rulers and judges setting themselves in array against heaven. If the leaders go wrong, who can expect the followers to do that which is right? We look to certain men to lead the sentiment of their time. He works under infinite disadvantage who is not encouraged in his small endeavours by the example and the stimulus of men of higher age and larger attainment than his own. When the prophets prophesy falsely, what wonder if the whole Church be given over to delusion.

Let us, in the next place, measure and determine everything by the divine "decree." What God hath purposed must stand. Has he ever spoken well of wickedness? Has he ever commended the wicked man? From end to end of the Bible the testimony of the divine righteousness is one; that righteousness is set against all the counsels of the wicked, and that righteousness is the very security of heaven. We find in the New Testament a confirmation of this psalm, as, for example (Acts xiii. 33): "It is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Thus the passage is appropriated for Christian uses. Whilst we avoid all merely fantastic spiritualising, we are not at liberty to decline interpretations which include the whole of the facts and cover the entire circle of their noblest significations. The last point of application may well be that we have received the threatening of the Lord, or the warning, and that by so much our responsibility is increased. Although we may not have received the gospel, we cannot deny that we have been warned of the evil of sin and of its necessary penalties. That is a point never to be overlooked in considering our exact relation to God. He can quote his own words against us, in that he has followed us with many a warning, importuned us with many an entreaty, alarmed us by many a judgment; and has followed up all this negative course by an offer of reconciliation to himself through the priesthood of his Son

Christian eyes can see in this second psalm much of the character and mission of the Son of God. It would seem as if the author saw the day breaking over the hills of heathen darkness. He does not scruple to depict the exact condition of affairs, and yet in all the gloom of night he begins to have hope of the approaching dawn. Great as has been the opposition against the divine righteousness, the writer begins to see that there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord. Whilst all the kings and rulers of the earth are embattled against heaven, the Psalmist beheld the incoming of One of whom he could say, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." He sees the enemies of the Lord being made into the footstool of Christ. In the darkest day the saints of God have had hope. The sight of heathenism should not depress the soul into moods of despair; it should turn expectation and attention in the direction of heaven itself, because out of its height shall come the King who shall rule all kings and the Saviour who shall taste death for every man. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." Wonderful things has God shown unto his watching children in the night-time. The darkness has not excluded the beauty of the future. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." None could have seen the darkness and terrible moral condition of the ancient world as the saints of old themselves did. To us it is but history, whilst to them it was the immediate fact of the day: yet from their lips we have the most eloquent prophecies of times that were to come. There is no sublimity higher than the prophecies of the psalmists and the seers of ancient times. "Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations." "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall

not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Oftentimes the joy of the ancient prophets rose into music of the purest quality,—“And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” The Old Testament has in it the joy of prophecy; the New Testament has in it the higher joy of realisation. What we have specially to note is that the decree is one, the law is continuous, the divine throne is unchanging and unchangeable in its occupancy, and that it is vain for human invention to attempt any other way of reconciliation with the Father, or to substitute any scheme that shall end in harmony with God except that which is laid down in the Sacred Book itself. “Kiss the Son.” Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Methods and policies and relations—all that constitutes the surface of human society must continually change, but at the heart of things is the immutable law that only by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can the world be redeemed and saved.

NOTE.

The kissing of princes was a token of homage (Psalm ii. 12; 1 Sam. x. 1). Xenophon says that it was a national custom with the Persians to kiss whomsoever they honoured. Kissing the feet of princes was a token of subjection and obedience; which was sometimes carried so far that the print of the foot received the kiss, so as to give the impression that the very dust had become sacred by the royal tread, or that the subject was not worthy to salute even the prince's foot, but was content to kiss the earth itself near or on which he trod (Isa. xlix. 23; Micah vii. 17; Psalm lxxii. 9). The Rabbins did not permit more than three kinds of kisses, the kiss of reverence, of reception, and of dismissal.

The peculiar tendency of the Christian religion to encourage honour towards all men, as men; to foster and develop the softer affections; and, in the trying condition of the early church, to make its members intimately known one to another, and unite them in the closest bonds—led to the observance of kissing as an accompaniment of that social worship which took its origin in the very cradle of our religion. Hence the exhortation—“Salute each other with a holy kiss” (Rom. xvi. 16; see also 1 Cor. xvi. 20; 2 Cor. xiii. 12; 1 Thess. v. 26; in 1 Peter v. 14, it is termed “a kiss of charity”). The observance was continued in later days, and has not yet wholly disappeared, though the peculiar circumstances have vanished which gave propriety and emphasis to such an expression of brotherly love and Christian friendship.—KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.

Psalm iii.

[NOTE.—This is the first psalm which is ascribed in the title to David. It is supposed to have been written by him in an hour of peril and persecution after the ark had been long established in Jerusalem. The hymn-book of Israel properly begins with this psalm. It is the only psalm in the book which is expressly assigned to the period of David's flight from Absalom. The structure of the psalm is regular—four divisions, with two verses of equal length (with one exception, verse 7). The fifth verse would seem to suggest that the psalm was composed for a morning song, as Psalm iv. is an evening song. In both the psalms the number of verses is the same. Probably this psalm was used in the liturgical service of the temple. The character of David is almost fully delineated in this composition.]

THE DIVINE PROTECTOR.

“Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me” (ver. 1).

WHEN a man's enemies increase in number the man should bethink himself, for surely they will not increase without reason. This is a matter which cannot be decided without careful consideration. It is no argument against a man that his enemies are millions strong, nor is it any argument in favour of the man that his friends are at least equal in number. At the same time it may be spiritually educative and useful to consider why there are so many enemies. Enmity may be founded upon jealousy, or envy, or opposition of conviction; or upon assurance that the individual against whom the enmity is directed is pursuing a mischievous course. It is for the man himself to retire within the sanctuary of his own conscience to discover his moral purpose in everything, and according as his integrity can be proved to stand fast even in solitude or desolation. But there is a self-analysis that is irreligious. It is conducted upon wrong principles, and the conductor of it is resolved upon self-vindication rather than upon an absolute discovery of truth, be it on which side it may. It should be remembered, too, that there are

some questions which cannot be decided in solitude ; the help of social influences is necessary to modify the judgment and to chasten the feeling of the inquirer. A second thought arising in this connection is that the very fact of the enemies being all but countless in number may be a tribute to the man's greatness. Armies are not sent out to cut down mushrooms or bulrushes. The very magnitude of the host encamped against a man may say without words how great the man is and mighty, and how worthy of being attacked. To leave some men alone is to withhold from them every moral and intellectual tribute. We say we treat certain persons with contempt, because they are utterly unworthy of serious criticism or opposition. Such persons are said to be treated with silent disdain. On the other hand, in proportion as a man is powerful and resolute, and is of social consequence, it may be necessary to combine against him in overwhelming numbers, the numbers themselves being a tribute to the very greatness which they desire to modify or overthrow. Then a third thought arises which cannot be dispensed with by any man who is anxious to understand his exact position : it is possible for a man to create a host of imaginary enemies, and so to make himself miserable without a shadow of reason. Infinite mischief arises from this perversion of mind. Honest men are put in false relations and are subjected to unnecessary tests and standards. Words, which are perfectly simple both in their colour and in their intention, are discoloured and twisted from their purpose, so that the frankest spirit is brought under unjust and ungenerous criticism. The man who practises this habit is suffering from a most disastrous mental and moral disease. Whatever he touches he withers. His own house becomes a grim sepulchre. Childhood, beauty, innocence are all polluted or perverted by his touch or use. Speaking generally, it is as a whole a wise thing to look for advantages and encouragements rather than to look at difficulties and hindrances in the education of the spiritual life. Certainly in all social relations and customs it is better to mistake an enemy for a friend than to mistake a friend for an enemy. Everything is gained by the large and generous view, and everything is lost by contracted and suspicious criticism. Then there comes the great difficulty of undue self-importance. Everything turns upon relations to the mere

individual, and thus the individual is exaggerated and ultimately settles into an unexpressed custom of self-consideration and even self-idolatry. It should always be remembered that when a great number of people are against a man the man himself is also against a great number of people. Both sides of the situation ought to be taken into due account if honest judgment is to be the result of examination. Speaking to God about our troublers and opponents, we seem to forget that the Lord himself is not of their number, and therefore in the very act of magnifying the opposition we forget the one thing that should throw that opposition into contempt and uselessness—namely, the omnipotence of God, which is eternally pledged on the side of the good and honest heart. If David had spoken more about the Lord and less about his enemies, his spiritual tranquillity would have remained undisturbed. But even David is drawn aside from the higher contemplations to consider the number of his enemies. Even the sublimest worshipper is not safe when he takes his eye away for one moment from the king in whom should be all his trust.

“Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God” (ver. 2).

In making statements of this kind a man should be exceedingly critical lest he unconsciously seek to tempt God. This may, in reality, be less a complaint than a challenge. A very subtle temptation thus assails the heart and clothes itself with religious forms and prostrates itself in pious attitudes. We know how this temptation works socially. We indirectly challenge our friends by reminding them of the position assumed towards us by our enemies. We quote or invent words supposed to have been uttered by the enemy, and these we pour into the ear of our friends with an unavowed but deeply-felt desire to stimulate them by the angry tones of those who are supposed to be in opposition to us. “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” At the same time it is perfectly possible for a man to be really mocked by the enemy and for these very words to be used against the devout soul. They were substantially used against Jesus Christ himself. The enemy said, “He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.”

It should be remembered also that there is an external view of providence which would seem to countenance the doctrine that affliction, desolation, or trial, is a manifest proof of divine displeasure. When a man is hunted and persecuted, when everything to which he puts his hand seems to fail, when his days are nights and his nights are unblessed by a single star, when his fields are turned into deserts and his gardens into stony places without blossom or fruit, there is a strong temptation addressed to the observer to regard persons suffering from such circumstances as disapproved or forsaken of God. This heathenish view of God is contradicted by the history of the Church and the personal consciousness of good men. We should remind ourselves of the noble saints who under such circumstances through their prayers and their faith were actually richer in their poverty than in their external wealth, and stronger in their supposed weakness than in their fancied security. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

"But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me" (vers. 3-5).

A vigorous realisation of the spiritual above the material. David seems now to be his true self. He has left the little and beclouded view and risen to levels whence he can survey the larger providence and purpose of heaven. Strange as it may appear, it is when material forces press against us with mightiest urgency that we see most of the nearness and sufficiency of the spiritual world. It is when we are driven to the very brink and our foothold seems to be insecure that we are enabled to commit ourselves to the security and love of the infinite. The twelve legions of angels seemed to be nearest Christ when his enemies were triumphing over him. That is a consideration which should sustain the soul in every night of assault and danger. Material help is then of no use, it is out of place because out of harmony with the soul's deepest and richest experiences. There is a poverty which money cannot relieve. There is a danger to which an offered sword is little better than an affront. There are extremities in life which God only can handle; but it is the experience of the Church that in such extremities God has

magnified his grace towards his suffering ones and delivered them with great strength from the crises which afflicted the soul.

These verses show how much a man may have in reality when he seems to have absolutely nothing in appearance. David has described his estate as one of loneliness, amounting almost to utter desolation, so far as social relationships are concerned. He seems to be alone in the very midst of threatening and desperate enemies. His soul is mocked and his prayers are blown aside by the furious opposition of his pursuers. What then has David even in the midst of all this loss and peril and fear? He himself seems to give an inventory of his riches. First of all, he has a sense of security. This is evident from the words, "Thou art a shield for me." The image of divine protection under the type of a shield is of frequent occurrence in Holy Scripture. It occurs in the very first book of the Bible:—"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." In the Psalms the same image occurs again and again:—"The Lord God is a sun and shield,"—these are words which have comforted the Church in the hour of its saddest distresses. In the next place, David had a sense of prayer,—he described God as the lifter up of his head: the meaning is that though sore driven, he could still turn his eyes towards heaven, expectant of spiritual deliverance and benediction, and that even when his enemies were most heavily pressing upon him he was lifted up higher than any of them—a target to be shot at; but he knew that no arrow of the enemy could strike the head that was divinely sustained. Then David points out the fact of his own enjoyment of the quietness and refreshment of sleep,—“I laid me down and slept.” An eye so critical as this could never be without an object of divine care upon which to rest. We are too prone to think of God only as at the head of battles and as leading great hosts in orderly procession: we forget that he giveth his beloved sleep, that he dries the tears of sorrow, and that he does about us the work of a servant, ministering to our life in patience and tenderness and all-bountifulness of love. The warrior who talks about a shield and who rejoices in the lifting up of his head recognises in the gift of sleep the benediction of God. “I will both lay me down

in peace, and sleep : for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid : yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." God will never allow himself to be excluded from what may be termed the more quiet and domestic spheres of life. He as certainly closes the eyelids of his loved ones in sleep as he makes the outgoings of the morning and of the evening to rejoice.

"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people,* that have set themselves against me round about" (ver. 6).

Now a new tone occurs in the speech of David. The remarkable variation of experience depicted in this psalm is full of instruction and is set above all doubtful criticism by the fact that it is confirmed by our own knowledge of human life. We ourselves have passed through all this urgent and many-coloured transition. The sixth verse contains really no great boasting when the circumstances are fully considered. Why should a man set up in a castle of granite dare the tiny sparrows to invade his security? He that is for us is more than all that can be against us. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear : though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Yet on the side of our personal weakness this is surely no mean boast. When our children are against us, as Absalom was in this case, when we are poor, desolate, hunted, and persecuted in every way, it is something to have such a view of God as shall become to us a shield, a buckler, a strong tower, and a pavilion ; then we do not compliment God, we felicitate ourselves upon the

* *I'll not the myriads fear.*—"The myriads" was no hyperbolical expression. There were actually myriads rising against him ; and "myriads of the people," of his own people, all over the country ; so that he could not tell who would befriend and who would betray him. Had "the people" stood by him, it would have been of less consequence though the army had gone over to Absalom ; but he was in the midst of a population that could not be depended on—that, in the excitement of the moment, scarcely knew their own mind. Yet was he fearless of the increasing myriads that declared against him. And not because they were still at a distance ; for they were "round about," already hovering close at hand, if not in active pursuit. Even Ahithophel, with his twelve thousand, would not now find it easy to "make him afraid" (2 Sam. xvii. 2). His Protector was nearer than they, and to him he cries.—DALMAN HAPSTONE, M.A.

unmerited possession and enjoyment of his favour. It should always be remembered that by fear we dishonour God. We are not only without faith, which is to our soul an inexpressible loss of dignity and strength, but we actually dishonour the Most High by a spirit of fear, suspicion, and cowardice, leading the mocker to taunt us and to ask us bitterly as to our God and our hope.

"Arise, O Lord ; save me, O my God : for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone ; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly " (ver. 7).

Unless this prayer be the expression of the soul in its highest and heavenliest moods, it is the most insidious impiety. A man is not entitled to exaggerate his own cause, when he is putting the case to God, as between himself and his enemies. It is very natural for a man to think that whoever is against him must be a fool, a knave, and a wicked person altogether. We never see all the aspects of a case. In the wars of nations each side commends itself to God, assured that it is right and that heaven will bring its banners to victory. For the chastening of the soul it is always necessary to keep in view the fact that no man can see beyond the circle of which he himself is the centre ; he only knows one set of circumstances or one aspect of facts, or he omits from his outlook objects and considerations which are absolutely necessary to the completeness of the case. Little prayers will be the result of little conceptions. The prayer, even in its utmost fervour, that is bounded by the selfhood of the suppliant is a prayer to which no great answer can be returned. Opponents are not without good qualities. The enemy himself has a conscience, a sense of responsibility, and it may be some apprehension of the value and blessedness of prayer. Better, therefore, pray that righteousness may succeed and that true justice may be done than that any particular individual should be honoured at the expense of others. Our prayer should not be "Arise, O Lord, and save me," but "Arise, O Lord, and vindicate equity, and bring forth righteousness and judgment as the morning and as the noonday." But who can pray that great prayer when his soul is encompassed on every side, and all the hosts of evil seem to be set in deadly array against him ? Still, this pharisaism or self-satisfaction must be utterly cleansed out of the heart before the heart

can offer great and generous prayer. How apt we are to suppose that persons who are our enemies are also enemies of God ! Thus we dishonour our Father in heaven. Thus, indeed, we perpetrate a kind of idolatry which is hardly at all disguised. When we pray the great impersonal prayer, "Not my will, but thine, be done," we shall have entered into the mystery of Christ's fellowship with the Father. Until we realise that profound communion with the infinite, our prayers must of necessity be narrowed and tainted by selfishness.

"Salvation belongeth unto the Lord : thy blessing is upon thy people" (ver. 8).

Here the Psalmist happily escapes from the narrow circle of his own affairs and takes wing for the open firmament of heaven. The distinction as to divine favour is not so clear between one man and another as the Psalmist seemed to imagine, for the rain cometh down upon the just and upon the unjust, and God is kind to the unthankful and the evil. But the doctrine of this verse is universally and for ever true. All complete deliverance or salvation is from the Lord ; and the divine blessing rests upon God's people in a sense which they alone can spiritually discern and appreciate. Whilst a man is confused by the details of his own cause he is at the mercy of every change of circumstances ; but when he takes his stand upon God's sovereignty and righteousness he is resting upon a rock which cannot be shaken. Throughout the Bible God is careful to reserve his own sovereignty. "I, even I, am the Lord ; and beside me there is no Saviour." "There is no God else beside me ; a just God and a Saviour ; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth : for I am God, and there is none else." However great may be our spiritual liberties we are still bound to the eternal centre. However multitudinous and energetic may be secondary causes, and however helpful they may be, we must take the mind steadily and thoroughly back to the throne of God, and remember that there is but one majesty in the universe and one everlasting righteousness.

We may well ask why our circumstances are more trying than our neighbours'. The Psalmist represents the bitterest of all

human experience and the loneliest of all forsakenness. It was the man's own son who had turned against him ; his very house had torn up its own foundations, and all security and joy had vanished from the family circle. Let this extremity of pain represent the whole tragedy of human trial, and then we may find companionship and help in the society of the distressed king. Then will arise the inquiry whether the defence which saved David is unequal to our protection. David found his comfort in God. So long as he looked at his enemies he was bowed down with dismay. Whilst he fixed his vision upon external circumstances he saw nothing that could give him one moment's gladness. But when he turned towards the holy hill of Zion and cried unto the Lord, he fell asleep like a little child, and awoke with new strength because of the sustaining hand of God. After that divinely-given sleep David accounted ten thousand men as nothing, and regarded all their fortresses as but walls of straw. So between our present despondency and our future consciousness of power there may intervene but one night of religious sleep. Do not judge all life by the weakness of this eventide : true, we are faint, yea, we are utterly exhausted, and it seems as if the very least of our enemies could drive us into uttermost distress : what we have to do is to cry unto the Lord with our voice, and in answer to that prayer there will come not deliverance but sleep that is rest, a season of recrital and reinvigoration, and in the morning, awakened by the very hand who gave us sleep, we shall be able to account ten thousand as less than one man, and all the host of the enemy as but so many clouds which the wind driveth away. Is any man afflicted ? Let him pray. Are we about to surrender our religious confidence ? Let us hear the voice of ancient history—"I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."

Psalm iv.

[NOTE.—This is the Evening Psalm, and probably it was composed at the same period as the preceding psalm. It is supposed that some of the expressions point to the period of the persecution of David by Saul; on the other hand, it is asserted that they are quite compatible with that of David's flight from Absalom. There are no imprecations upon his foes, a circumstance which is considered to point to Absalom rather than to Saul. This was one of the psalms repeated by Augustine at his conversion. The psalm is addressed "To the chief Musician;" in the margin the word is "overseer." Probably the inscription is to one who has obtained the mastery, or one who holds a superior post. We read of this officer in 2 Chron. ii. 18, xxxiv. 12. In 1 Chron. xv. 19 it is stated that the musical directors—Asaph, Heman, and Ethan—had cymbals and took part in the performance, and hence the word "the chief Musician" would answer to "a leader of the band." It is considered that the word *precentor* is perhaps on the whole the best equivalent. The word *Neginoth* is a musical term, occurring in the titles of six psalms; it is derived from a root which means *to touch the strings*, and may point to the explanation "upon stringed instruments or with harp accompaniment."]

1. Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

2. O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah.*

3. But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him.

4. Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

5. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.

6. There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

7. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

8. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

THE QUEST FOR HAPPINESS.

THIS is a fair-weather psalm. David has been in distress, and now the clouds have been blown away and the blue sky has returned; so he does what many seldom think of doing:

* See note, *post*, p. 78.

he thanks God for deliverance and enlargement, and takes no credit to himself. In his high spiritual delight he rebukes those who love vanity, and those who go after lies or leasing. This is the inevitable operation of piety : it must rebuke evil ; it cannot be silent in the presence of wrong. People who had seen his distress had questioned his religion, and in so doing had sought to turn his glory into shame, and had exclaimed that vanity was better than prayer, and that lying was better than sacrifice. They pointed to facts in proof of their irreligious doctrine ; they said, "Look at David ; he prays, and faints ; he calls out for God, and God lets him die amongst the stones of the wilderness ; let us then pursue vanity, and let us take refuge in lies."

Now David's time has come, and the facts are all on his side. He falls back upon experience ; he becomes his own argument ; and his answer is so full, so wise, so firm, that it may be used as a defence by all who have proved the goodness and helpfulness of God in their distress.

Let us put David's answer into modern words :—

(1) You have mockingly said, Look at David in his distress ; now that very captivity has been turned by the Most High, David replies : Look at me in my enlargement and thankfulness. My turn has come. You must not look at a man's distress alone, and build an argument upon his sorrow ; you must take into view the whole compass of his life. Will you say that the earth is a failure because of one bad harvest ? It is important rigidly to apply this inquiry because of the tendency of the human mind to think more of trials than of mercies, and to magnify the night above the day. David would thus seem to take a philosophic view of human life, in that he will not have it judged by any series of details but will insist upon penetrating to the core and meaning of the whole. Refraining from such penetration, what can we expect from any survey of life but misapprehension ? There is a middle line in life which alone affords a true basis of comprehensive judgment regarding the meaning of God in the mystery of our existence. No doubt there are days even in the Christian life which by their very darkness exclude God and cast

a doubt not only upon his providence but upon his existence. There are other days so full of bright sunshine and high joy that the soul might be tempted to imagine that the period of discipline had closed and the time of self-restraint was at an end. Neither of these times must be taken by itself. We must blend them in our view, and consider what average they yield. In this instance David was justified in calling attention to his enlargement because his imprisonment had been a theme of rejoicing on the part of the adversary. As a retort the answer is seasonable and complete. But we have something more to do than to fashion quick and just retorts to the enemy; we have to put things together and to see how they shape themselves into an argument for the divine government, and an indication of the meaning of our own life and service upon the earth.

(2) David continues: You have been judging by unusual circumstances and special visitations of trial, but instead of this you should rest on great principles, and especially on the principle "that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." Wholly so; he is as much the Lord's when in sorrow as in joy, in the wilderness as in Salem: we must not regard sorrow as a brand or a stain; it is religious; it is part of the great school-scheme by which God trains, purifies, and strengthens men. When God sets apart a man for himself, the man must recognise the fact that he is not at liberty to change his place or to curtail the time of discipline. It is enough for him to know that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." The godly man is strong in the conviction that God hath from the beginning chosen him to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Again and again we must recognise the fact that appearances often seem to suggest that the godly man is forgotten. It is impossible to deny this if we limit our survey of the situation within limits too narrow to enclose even the outline of a plan. It would also seem at certain periods of the year as if God had forgotten the earth itself: for what blessing can there be in the thick ice or in the drowning rain? Yet even wintry circumstances are preparing for summer blessings. The year is neither all summer nor all winter: so it is with our human life;

it also has its four seasons, and only by the four taken in their entirety can the life-year be wisely and rightly judged.

(3) David seems to have found an argument upon his circumstances to the effect : if you believe this, you will "stand in awe, and sin not ;" that is, you will pray even in the storm, and you will bow down in homage when the Lord passeth by in judgment ; you will go into the blighted wheat-field and say, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ;" a desolation shall teach you the power of the Most High. The word "awe" may be even taken here as suggestive in some degree of anger . that is to say, anger may rise against certain details in the providential plan : they are so aggravating, so disappointing, so hindering ; but even whilst this anger rises it is to be undefiled by the presence of sin. David calls men to quiet meditation. What else could be the meaning of his word ?—"commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still"—that is, examine yourselves ; see how far the explanation of outward disasters is in your own moral condition ; reflect, and do not talk ; think, and be quiet ; if you set up words against the Most High, you will vex your own soul and grieve the Spirit. Commune—talk to yourself—reflect, but do not speak loudly, or you will become vulgar and profane. It was no unusual practice for the Psalmist to betake himself into silent contemplation of the divine way in life. "I call to remembrance my song in the night : I commune with mine own heart : and my spirit made diligent search." Speech begets speech. Words are provocative of controversy. Better, therefore, to conduct our meditations in wordless silence ; our communion being with ourselves and with our God. When all tumult ceases God's softest tones may be heard, but whilst we live in the uproar of controversy, who can hear the going of the Most High ?

(4) David continues : You ask a man what you are to do in loss, and pain, and sorrow. You take counsel one with another in days of storm and distress. Let me tell you what you ought to do :—"Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,* and put your trust in the Lord" (ver. 5) ; continue in the way of duty ; go to the

* See note, *post*, p. 49.

sanctuary even when you have to grope for the sacred door in darkness; seek the altar, and say concerning God, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Your temptation will be to omit the sacrifices and to divide your trust; resist the devil; hold fast unto the end, and you shall be lifted high above the tumult of the crowd. People will say to you, "Who will shew us any good?" Let your prayer be unto the Lord. The question is shallow and impertinent; it is limited to one set of circumstances; be not moved by it, but let your prayer still and for ever ascend unto God. Sometimes you will have no answer left but prayer. Facts will be against you—logic will give you no help—human counsellors will be dumb—but if amidst all opposition and difficulty you are still found praying, you will confound and abash the unbeliever and the mocker. In being driven to a religious refuge you will feel the need of being yourself more religious. It will be no mere ceremony in which you engage, but a complete sacrifice and surrender of the heart. As you approach the altar where you expect to find comfort you will hear the divine voice saying—"Bring no more vain oblations. . . . Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." We do not flee to the altar in any mean and selfish spirit, but as having some claim upon its protection by reason of our living union with God. If that living union has been in any degree impaired reparation must be instantly made. "Pay thy vows unto the Most High." For the rest, even when persecution continues and the storm shows no sign of abating, the soul must take refuge in the doctrine—"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." David quotes a saying which is familiar to all ages: "Who will shew us any good?" This is the quest of the human heart for happiness. It is the cry of men who are conscious that something is missing, and hope strangely mingles with its despair. It is as the cry of a stranger in a strange land whom night has suddenly overtaken so that he can see no hope of rest, yet all the while in his heart there is the hope that at any moment a glimmer may break through the darkness and give him joy. Whilst men are asking the question, the Church ought to be giving the sublime answer which is found in

the sixth verse :—"Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." Religious deliverance is always wrought by light. We are not carried away in the darkness; we are the sons of the morning and children of the mid-day. We cannot forget the blessing we have already studied in the Book of Numbers :—"The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The Old Testament saints were continually dwelling with rapture upon this thought of divine illumination. "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." When the people were delivered and were put into possession of the land, the victory was not to be ascribed to their own sword, nor were they to lift up their arm as if it had gotten them their reward—"But thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them." It is in vain for us to seek to cleanse the firmament of darkness; that great miracle lies only within the scope of omnipotence. We can invent temporary plans, we can enkindle dying lights, we can make partial suggestions which for a moment may relieve mental and moral pressure, but the all-filling light is the gift of God alone: hence the cry of the saints of all ages has been that God would once more say "Let there be light." The Apostle Paul recognised this great blessing of light in the words—"God . . . hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The Christian may pray for light, that even the brightest day may be brighter and the light may be as the day.

(5) In the next place David says something which cannot be understood by the mere letter; it can be understood only by those who have passed through the same experience. He says, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (ver. 7). The idea is that in loss and poverty and apparent desolation there may actually be more gladness, more real and lasting spiritual delight, than in times of prosperity. The idea goes further than this and in another direction. The good man—the man whose trust is in the living God—has more gladness in his poverty than the worldly, unbelieving, mocking man has in all his corn and wine. There

is a sufficiency that brings no content, and there is a poverty that cannot dry the springs of the soul's gladness. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The rejoicing of the spiritual man is in spiritual riches. Jesus Christ said he had bread to eat that the world knew not of. When the heart is right towards God it does not feel the coldness of the wind or the pinch of poverty, being lifted high above all these lower influences and having conscious possession of all the blessedness and wealth of heaven. It must not be supposed that when corn and wine increase that gladness increases in proportion to the store. "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." The only enduring joy is in righteousness. The eternal heaven is in the eternal truth.

Thus David retires from the controversy to lie down and sleep though his enemies be many and his foes be men of might. He finds true safety only in the Lord; yea, when he appears to have no home and no rest, he feels that he is encircled by the everlasting arms. There is room in the tower of God for thee, my soul! Run away from all controversy, and make thyself quiet in God! "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders."

NOTE.

Offerings of righteousness.—Another direction he gave them was to "sacrifice the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in Jehovah." Absalom at Hebron had been sacrificing too (2 Sam. xv. 12); but his sacrifices were of quite another kind. He professed to be paying a vow which he had never vowed; to be serving God, while he was preparing to push God's anointed from the throne. At the same time he was putting his trust in Ahithophel, whom he had sent for (2 Sam. xv. 12), and not in the blessing of God, whose favour he was professedly seeking by these sacrifices. The direction resolves itself into three parts: (a) to come before God with sacrifices free from all taint of knavery and wickedness; (b) to rest all their hopes of success on his interposition; (c) to expect with confidence his aid.—DALMAN HAPSTONE, M.A.

Psalm v.

[NOTE.—The inscription is supposed to be suspicious. The psalm is a sign of the troublous times of the later monarchy. At the time of the composition of this psalm the adherents of Jehovah's religion were intensely disliked and universally calumniated. The literal rendering of the title is, "To the leader on the flutes." It might also be read, "To the precentor, with flute accompaniments." The word *Nehiloth*, means *bored instruments*. Some critics have derived the word from the Chaldee, and made it mean "a swarm of bees," referring to the multitudes reciting the psalm. The use of flutes in the religious services of the Hebrews is proved by 1 Sam. x. 5; 1 Kings i. 40; Isa. xxx. 29.]

1. Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation.
2. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God : for unto thee will I pray.
3. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning,* O Lord ; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.
4. For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness : neither shall evil dwell with thee.
5. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight : thou hatest all workers of iniquity.
6. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing : the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.
7. But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy : and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.
8. Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies ; make thy way straight before my face.
9. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth ; their inward part is very wickedness ; their throat is an open sepulchre ; they flatter with their tongue.
10. Destroy thou them, O God ; let them fall by their own counsels ; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions ; for they have rebelled against thee.
11. But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice : let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them : let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.
12. For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous ; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

* See note, *post*, p. 56.

PERSONAL PRAYER AND PRAISE.

THIS psalm is a direct address to the Almighty. We are not aware that any special instructions as to exact form were ever given to man in view of his approaching God in personal prayer. Reverence was enjoined, but no set form of words was given; every heart was left to find words for itself; whatever best expressed its sorrow and its need, if spoken in truth, was acceptable to God. Taking this psalm as an example of personal waiting upon God—separating it from all merely local circumstances—what may we learn concerning Personal Worship?

Mark the Directness of the speech. No priest stands between the worshipper and his Lord. Every man must state his own case. We pray for one another, but not instead of one another. What can be more beautiful than the picture which is thus represented? God is put in his right place as the throned father listening to each of his subjects as the subject may feel impelled to address him. Every word is charged with tremulous life. No man can pray for another in the same exquisite and vital sense as a man can pray for himself: there are always circumstances in the case of the petitioner which the petitioner alone knows, and even though he cannot throw such circumstances into literal expression he can suggest them all by the very tones of his voice. We mistake the nature of prayer if we think it can be limited by words. Even when we use the words of another in our devotional exercises we throw into their expression accents which are personal and incommunicable. It is in such tones and accents that the true quality of the prayer is found. If prayer consisted only in the utterance of certain words, then the wicked might pray, and pray with great elocutionary effect; but the prayer is hardly in the words at all: it is a subtle fragrance of the soul, an inexpressible something which we understand most nearly by the name of agony. This being the nature of prayer, it follows that whatever priestly mediation there may be in the universe—and that there is such mediation no student of the Bible can deny—the individual himself must stand in a direct relation to God, receiving help from the

priest, but not in any degree to obliterate his personality or reduce his spiritual enjoyment.

Then, again, mark the Earnestness of the speech. There is not one formal sentence in it from end to end. The man means what he says. There is no merely literary composition in his address; it is the heart's passion for the time being. This marvellous agony of prayer is a wonderful feature in Old Testament devotion. The suppliant almost insists upon having his own way with God. He is so absolutely sure of the righteousness of his cause that he cannot for a moment doubt that God will instantly reply to him in judgment or in mercy, as the case may be. The Old Testament saints did not argue a case before God in fine balancing of words and arguments, by an elaborate process of giving and taking; they came boldly with a cause about whose genuineness they had no doubt, and as it were insisted upon an immediate reply wholly in their own favour. All earnestness is in a degree associable with narrow-mindedness: not narrow-mindedness in the sense of selfishness or meanness, but in the sense of intensity, the mind being held at such a strain as not to admit of looking to the right hand or to the left, or of suspending its agony even for one instant. Earnestness is but another word for burning. When the soul is on fire it is really in earnest. Who can think of prayer in any other sense? To stand before God at all with sincerity and truthfulness is to be called up to the very highest point of being. At such a moment the man realises all the force and quality of his manhood, all its grandeur, and all the possibilities of its future: by this, indeed, he knows whether the soul is really in the exercise of prayer or not; falling below this exalted consciousness the man may at once conclude that he has not touched the mystery and the enjoyment of true communion with God. This ought to be true of all religious exercises and relationships. To be in the sanctuary ought to be in a state of complete release from every memory and anxiety that can distract the attention or trouble the reverence of the soul. This we know to be almost impossible, having due regard to all the conditions of life; but that which is abstractly impossible may be ideally influential, and may constrain the soul to move upwards towards its perfect realisation

Having marked the Directness of the speech, and the Earnestness of the prayer, we may next dwell upon the Intelligence which the speaker displays. For example, what a marvellous conception he has of the character of God :—

“For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness : neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight : thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing : the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man” (vers. 4-6).

The suppliant was therefore by so much a theologian. Without a true conception of the nature of Almighty God, how can prayer be addressed to him? We might be speaking the wrong language, or directing our observations to the wrong point, or invoking judgment in the very act of supplicating mercy. Knowledge, therefore, would seem to be the very basis of prayer. Not knowledge in any scientific sense as involving great ability in analysis or in metaphysical perception and expression; but the knowledge which realises the fatherhood of God and all the willingness and love of his heart; a knowledge, too, that realises the righteousness of God, righteousness being no narrow term, but a word which embraces the most multifarious elements and reconciles them in one noble truth. According to the Psalmist's conception, God is righteous, severe, ineffable in holiness, terrible in judgment. Now a conception of this kind must exalt the devotional feeling of every man who entertains it. It is not possible for the soul to go before such a God with frivolous words or with tones and postures unworthy of the being who is addressed. The God will always make the prayer. According to the soul's conception of the throne that is addressed will be the elevation and reverence and grandeur of the terms that are employed, or if not of the terms in any literary sense, yet of the tones which express the soul's divinest moods. Then the Psalmist has also a clear view of the character and deserts of the wicked; wickedness is something more to him than an error of judgment, or an excusable eccentricity, or a mere vapour which shuts out the best hopes of life. He who entertains but a superficial conception of wickedness can never in reality pray. He may patronise some deity, or pay ceremonial attention to some ideality, but pray he never can. Only the consciously wicked and helpless man can utter the words, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” with any

spiritual effect. We never know God's mercy until we know man's wickedness. When we go before God we must carry with us no excuse either of our own sin or the sins of other people; we must express ourselves in utter abhorrence and detestation, and do this not in words only, but with the very heart and soul. This is really more than negative worship. The soul must be in a very positive mood before it can adopt the language of denunciation and rejection with regard to moral evil. The terms themselves may from a literary point be simply negative; but they never could have been used but for the positive condition of soul in which the speaker found himself at the time of their burning utterance.

If this is the kind of prayer which the Lord will hear, then let us gladly learn, first of all, that one man will be heard. This idea does not degrade the majesty of heaven, but rather exalts it. Our vicious imagination is prone to think that the God of the universe can condescend to listen to nothing but the speech of the universe itself. The Bible finds it infinitely difficult to rid the human mind of this unworthy and debasing sophism. We think we exalt God by coming before him in countless numbers, and with elaborate and costly display of ceremony and action; whereas his very greatness is enlarged to our conception by the fact that though heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, he will find for himself a sanctuary in the broken and contrite heart. We must invert our ideas of greatness when we apply them to the divine being. We express our reverence most acceptably when we recognise God as numbering the hairs of our head, caring for the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air, carrying the lambs in his bosom, and condescending to men of low estate. Greatness is a question of quality, not of bulk. It follows that those who are heard and answered in prayer should be enthusiastic in their joy. This is made evident by the eleventh verse :—

“But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”

Prayer finds its true sequel in praise. The very act of prayer, when conducted according to the conception already laid down,

fills the soul with enthusiasm. The soul feels that it has been engaged in a great exercise and has been ennobled by it, and in withdrawing from the personal interview with the king there is a radiance of face which symbolises a still higher brightness and glory of soul. The only thing that can properly succeed prayer is praise. Every other tone would be an anti-climax. Even shouting for joy would seem to be the true sequence of profound and reverent silence in communion.

Regarding this as an acceptable prayer, we may correct some mistaken notions of worship. For example, it is often said that we may not tell God what he already knows. If this were so there would be no prayer at all, for God knows everything, and therefore no information can be conveyed to him. We do not instruct God by the enumeration of facts; we rather educate our own minds and train them to fulness of survey and accuracy of statement. Education is a very subtle process, and is not all done from the outside. Sometimes the mere utterance of language shows us how imperfectly we are instructed in the tongue which we use. The parent loves to hear the child talk, though the child has nothing to say of the nature of intelligence or information. The utterance has an educational effect upon the speaker himself: so it is in the exercise of prayer: as we begin to enumerate our wants, our necessities grow upon us in number and in force, until imagination takes fire and almost invents a new language for the expression of new consciousness. It is absurd to suppose that we must not tell God the facts of life simply because God already knows them; the use which Jesus Christ made of God's knowledge is of course the right use: it is that our words should be few—not in the sense of number, but should be condensed, expressive, charged with the highest meaning, throbbing with immeasurable intensity of feeling. We are often told that we ought not to make a speech to God in prayer. By this canon the psalm before us never could have been written, for it is of the very nature of a noble religious oration: it is, indeed, a solemn eulogium upon the character and attributes of God. The fact is, the finite must often pray as best it can, now in speech, now in statement, now in a review of life; the one thing which must not be lost is earnestness; so long as that can

be kept at the fervid point the soul may allow itself to run on in utterance and praise and supplication and thanksgiving. We are often told that prayer means asking for something. That is a vicious mistake. It is possible to pray without asking for anything in the narrow sense of the term. Prayer includes fellowship with God, close communion with the Spirit of the universe, long speech concerning truth, purity, duty, and heaven. We are more than beggars when we come before the throne of God: we are children, adopted ones, saints, fellow-heirs with Christ; and the soul would be impoverished beyond all conception if it could not dwell with thankfulness and rapture upon the abundance of the divine mercy and the delightfulness of filial communion. Men should never allow themselves to be beaten back and impoverished by the narrow and unworthy criticism which limits prayer to mere petitioning or requisition. That the soul will always have blessings to ask for has been made clear enough by human experience; but the highest request it has to offer is that its own will may be transformed and made coincident with the will of God. All prayers are brought into one complete desire in the words of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done."

SELECTED NOTE.

The efficacy of morning prayer.—The efficacy and especial obligation of morning prayer is continually dwelt on by Orientals. Thus in the Talmud, we read, "Every one that eateth and drinketh, and after that says his prayers, of him the Scripture saith, 'But me thou hast cast behind thy back.'" And again, "It is forbidden to a man to go about his business before praying." So too the Koran, "Perform the prayer at the declining of the sun, at the first darkness of the night, and the prayer of day-break, for the prayer of day-break is borne witness to." And so Hafiz, the great Persian lyric poet, addressing the beloved in mystical language, says, "In the morning hours be on thy guard (lest thou be compelled to hear) if this poor stranger make his complaint." Such instances might be multiplied almost without limit. The habit of going to prayer before taking food will explain the words of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 15); the disciples could not have eaten or drunk, for it was still the hour of morning prayer,

Psalm vi.

[NOTE.—The end of this psalm is like the beginning. The psalm is like a voice from a bed of sickness, in which the sufferer is expecting a fatal termination to his disease. At verse eight the tone changes. No longer does the sufferer talk of sickness, but of enemies and workers of iniquity and human foes. May not the sufferings described be sufferings of the soul, rather than of the body? In Hebrew literature this would be quite permissible: pictures of physical pain and disease are often used to express moral evil. The Church has regarded this as the first of the penitential psalms. Probably the psalm was composed in the exile period. According to some critics the psalm harmonises with the transactions preceding the revolt of Absalom. If the sickness was bodily it was regarded by the Psalmist as part of the chastisement due to the great crime which brought disgrace and misery upon his later years. The three divisions of the psalm are verses 1-3, 4-7, 8-10.]

1. O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

2. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.

3. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long?

4. Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

5. For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

6. I am weary with my groaning: all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

7. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

8. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.

9. The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.

10. Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.

SORROW AND SUCCOUR.

THE whole of this psalm has about it the air of a sick man: the Psalmist says that his bones are vexed, that he lies awake all night, and that his eye is consumed because of grief;

he speaks, too, of death and of the grave.* During his sickness David was unable to discharge the duties of the kingly office; this gave Absalom considerable advantage in exciting a revolt; so we have before the fancy a double picture of distress—David shut up in his sick chamber, and Absalom doing his utmost to set the kingdom against his father. Perhaps we have been in the habit of thinking that the Psalms were written at the window of a beautiful library, flowers growing luxuriantly on sunny walls, and the green lawn stretching far away, brightened here and there by birds of rare plumage; we have looked upon them, it may be, as the pious recreations of a morning hour—entries in a spiritual diary relating only to the sentimental, and never to the practical side of life. The exact contrary is the case. Some of these psalms are battles. Many of them came out of heartache and bitterness and mortal disappointment. They are pages of autobiography. They are channels worn by the urgent streams of life. We must never think of them as mere literary recreations, or as the effusions of a music composer; they are pangs of the heart, they are letters addressed to God, they are the sanctification of misery and helplessness and despair. If it is worth while to explore the head of a river, it is of infinitely greater consequence to find out the spring and source of the streams which make glad the city of God.

We may get the meaning and help of the psalm by asking, How did David conduct himself in the time of sickness and of trouble?—First of all, he made his sorrow a question between himself and God. An old divine has said, as the woman in story appealed from pillar to pillar, so does David fly from God's anger to God's grace. David did not regard it in its earthward aspect; there was something in his trouble more than mere bodily pain, and something more than mere political disaffection. Let us set it down as a stern fact that there is a moral secret under the whole

* Trapp, the commentator, says: "In this and some other psalms David begins so heavily, ends so merrily, that we might think they had been composed by two men of a contrary humour. Every new man is two men. (Rom. vii.). The Shulamite hath in her 'as it were the company of two armies' (Song of Sol. vi. 13). The Lord also chequereth his providence white and black, he speckleth his work (represented by those speckled horses, Zech. i. 8); mercies and crosses are interwoven."

figure and movement of human life. Wherever we find disorder we find sin. This doctrine puts an end to much of the false complaining to which we are accustomed in Church life and experience. Men profess to be seeking for causes and explanations which lie quite remote from the real origin of the distress. We should never forget that all pain, suffering, and misery flow from one fountain whose unchangeable name is Sin. "Sin brought death into our world."

Secondly, proceeding from this point, David proceeds to make things right between himself and God. He feels that it is of no use to trump up a peace with Absalom. It is a waste of time to be arranging things that are secondary until things that are primary are established upon a footing righteous and secure. David seems to have said to himself: "My son Absalom has set himself against me; I might excite public pity on the ground of filial ingratitude; but is there not a cause in myself? Have I not done wrong, and become infamous in wickedness before the Lord? Is not God employing Absalom as a scourge to punish me for my own grievous rebellion against himself?" Such questions bring the soul into a right temper, and deliver it from the fretfulness of narrow views. It is waste of labour to decorate the walls when the foundations are giving way. In all trouble go first in self-reproach to God and get at the cause of things. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." The whole philosophy of human sorrow lies in this one determination. We exalt God in sovereignty above all great providences, and we have no hesitation in describing him as directing all operations to a common issue: but even in this broad acknowledgment of God's supremacy we may not sufficiently fix the mind upon the fact that every detail of life is under the superintendence of God's wisdom, and that not a sorrow afflicts the soul which he does not either directly inflict or lovingly permit. God is not the God of the fair day only, the great broad shining day; he is the God of the night; at his command the stars glitter and the planets serenely burn.

In the third place, David feels that if the Lord's hand be removed he can bear all other troubles. Sin is the disease;

discomforts, revolts, losses are the mere symptoms: remove the disease, and the symptoms will disappear. The pain of trouble is in the feeling that it is deserved; could we be perfectly sure of our innocence, the suffering would have no effect upon us, except rather to encourage and stimulate us, and certainly chasten us into a truer refinement of temper. Innocent men can be calm in the midst of persecution and pain and loss. Innocence is as a comforting angel sent from heaven to sustain the heart. It is when the soul knows that every pain that shoots through the life is a pain that is deserved that the whole being quivers with agony and all strength fails from the spirit. This is our true condition before God, and we must acknowledge it to be so if we are faithful to ourselves. So long as there lingers in the mind the superstition that suffering is not deserved but is arbitrarily imposed, and expresses the domination of a supreme power rather than the beneficence of a stern law, we shall be without consolation or strength or hope in all the discipline of life. Take away the righteousness of the suffering, and then suffering is as an open door into our life through which the angels come. The innocent man is never in solitude, unless it be for one agonising moment to be succeeded by all the glory and peace of heaven.

David approaches God in utter self-renunciation; there is no word of self-defence as before God. This is needful in all prayer that is meant to prevail. This state of mind does away with the whole machinery of argument, witnesses, criticism, and cross-examination. It resolves the question into one of mercy. David prays the more earnestly, because his afflictions have brought him within sight of the grave and the world unseen. Who would enter the valley without a sense of forgiveness? Who would? We must enter that dark valley,—we enter it either forgiven or unpardoned.

Now the light returns. David knows that his prayer is answered. The next work is easy. It is merely a question of time. Be right with God, and your foes cannot touch you.

"Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping" (ver. 8).

A very full verse is this. It shows that David is not only not

content with prayer being answered ; he must dissociate himself from all wicked men and wicked concerns. If David looked upon the wicked in this instance as his pursuers and his enemies, he was right to bid them begone ; but there is another sense in which the workers of iniquity may follow us, namely, in the sense of temptation and seduction and forced companionship : we shall know that the Lord hath heard the voice of our weeping when we are able to bid such men depart from us, because they can find nothing in our hearts that responds to their evil purposes. Thus prayer makes men morally strong. They can say things after prayer which they could not have said before prayer ; or if they did say them the words would be wanting in pith and force ; we need to have our tongues made strong by the exercise of prayer before it can effectively speak to the workers of iniquity and bid them flee away from our path. A wonderful alternation of weakness and energy is found throughout this psalm. David is so weak that one angry word would have destroyed him ; so he deprecates the anger and the displeasure of the Most High : he is so weak that only mercy must breathe upon him or touch him or venture to speak to him : every bone in his body is withering, and his soul is in extreme dismay. By reason of incessant groaning he has become weary, and his strength has been dissolved in tears, and as for his eye, it is consumed because of grief, and it has waxed old as if by the multiplication of years. Now he has been in prayer he rises from his knees like a giant refreshed ; his weariness has been accepted as a petition, and his weeping has been regarded as a plea for renewal of strength ; mark how he rises from his knees and makes the workers of iniquity flee before him. That is the true Amen with which God follows all earnest prayer. If we still dally with the foe, and compromise with our enemies, and speak in hesitating tones to those who would do us injury, we may know of a certainty that how eloquent soever our prayer may have been in words, it has been unheard in heaven or rejected with divine contempt.

Revised

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou take account of our sorrow, and consider our trouble when we are in great and sore distress. Thou knowest that there are nights in which no star can be seen, there are seas which are all storm, tempests without measure, not to be passed but with infinite danger. But thou reignest ; thy throne is in the heavens which are high ; yet are thine eyes upon the earth, upon the meanest of its creatures and the most trivial of its concerns. The Lord's hand is stretched out towards all his children ; they have a place in his heart—secure, inviolable, eternal. This is their joy, their hymn in the night-time, their psalm in the morning, their victory all the day. Draw nigh unto us, Holy One ; keep us as in the hollow of thy hand ; let our walls be continually before thee ; may our name be unto thee as a pleasant memorial, and all our concerns interest thy wisdom and thy love. We will fear no evil ; yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our heart shall be stout in God, for thy rod and thy staff they comfort us, and in the valley is an infinite light. Blessed one, Christ of God, Son of God, walk with us in the valley, climb the hill with us, shield us when the air is full of darts aimed at our life, and comfort us with exceeding comfort when consolation is the only medicine we require. We bless thee for all heroic souls, for all patient spirits, for all men who have done the will of God, and for those other and equally noble men who have suffered it without murmur, complaint, or reproach against heaven. Order our life during the few remaining days it has yet to run ; may they be days of industry, days of consecration to heavenly labour, and therefore days like Sabbaths, full of restfulness and expectation and joy, not to be spoken in the words of man. Wash us, and we shall be clean ; give us the sprinkling of blood which means pardon, acceptance, adoption ; give us the indwelling Spirit of God, that, walking under his counsel, comforted by his solaces, directed by his wisdom, our lives may be spent in all holiness, patience, and good-doing. Amen.

Psalm vii.

[NOTE.—This psalm was composed when David and his band were surrounded by the snares which had been laid for them by the agents of Saul. The psalm was occasioned by the treachery of Cush. The word *Shiggaion*, which is at the head of it, is a musical term, and probably denotes a lyrical composition indicative of high mental excitement. The first part, of five verses, closes with "Selah." The remainder is divisible into two parts of six verses each ; but the last verse stands alone, in all probability as a simple interjection.]

1. O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust : save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me :

2. Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.

3. O Lord my God, if I have done this ; if there be iniquity in my hands ;

4. If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me ; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy :)

5. Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it ; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust. Selah.

6. Arise, O Lord, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies : and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded.

7. So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about : for their sakes therefore return thou on high.

8. The Lord shall judge the people : judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me.

9. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end ; but establish the just : for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.

10. My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart.

11. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

12. If he turn not, he will whet his sword ; he hath bent his bow and made it ready.

13. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death ; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.

14. Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.

15. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.

16. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.

17. I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness : and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high.

HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

DAVID was young when this psalm was written. There is a good deal of youthful force and urgency in its noble terms. Is there not a youthful style of composition, in which everything is superlative, towering, forceful, wanting, if in anything, in moderation ? This man has no doubt about himself,—what young man ever has ? He is perfectly sure that heaven cannot regard him but with complacency. His life has been comparatively short ; he can count its days, and examine each, and pronounce upon each day and say, “ Well-kept ”—a day of religious recognition of the nearness of God, and of religious

service towards his fellow creatures. The enemy Cush the Benjamite was all wrong. What man could ever see two sides of a case? Who, being persecuted and overborne, did not feel that he was the injured party, and that the other man was a very child of darkness, given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie? Who Cush was we need not inquire, because he lives every day. Cush was a Benjamite, an Ethiopian, a black man—most black, in and out, in David's eyes. Is there not an Ethiopian before every man—a black spot, a black difficulty, a black storm—but for which all the outlook would be beautiful as a summer morning? Who does not feel that there is a cold shadow on the road he slowly treads—not a shadow he can cross and leave behind him, but a shadow that accompanies him that will play the unwelcome companion to his steps, that will sometimes almost rise from the ground and look at him hideously and defiantly? We cannot get rid of that shadow. It comes in all kinds of forms and in all kinds of measure; but, to a certainty, there it is. David is in a court; David is surrounded by splendour; David is in many respects and relations a high favourite; he can do what many other men cannot do; he can make the harp vibrate with music to please the ear of the king; he is sought after; and yet the Ethiopian looks at him and kills all the sunshine; when he passes by, Cush the Benjamite utters a hiss which takes out of David's life all its young hope. Is it not so to-day? and will it not be so to the end of the chapter? And is it not true—account for it as we may—that the difficulty destroys the enjoyment, the one thin dark line shuts out the sun, blots out the radiant heavens, and makes life very burdensome? Why should it be thus? We have a thousand mercies; we own the number; there is no dispute about the arithmetical count: the mercies are a thousand strong; but there is one shadow, one hindrance, one trouble, one little stubborn gate we cannot open; and under the influence of that exceptional, even solitary circumstance the thousand mercies go for nothing. Cush may have been Saul himself. It may have been the king that made David's life a burden to him. Yet he was in the king's service and in the king's pay. He lived more or less in the king's house, and he liked to be there. There was in him something that said, "This man and his kingliness is a relation of mine. I have a

long way to look up to see his towering head, and sometimes I am almost afraid of him ; it seems as if by closing his fingers upon me he could crush me. Yet, I cannot account for it, there is something in me that likes the man, that claims him as one of my own kindred ; he and I seem to be in the same lineage. I could run away from the palace, and yet I could not ; I could shatter the harp, yet my fingers will not break a string of it. I would I were done with this royal subservience, and yet I like it ; it is slavery, and yet it is worship ; it has a hateful aspect, and yet it wins me by a blessed fascination." That is human experience. The thing we cannot live without is sometimes the thing that hinders us most. The difficulty is in close quarters with our life ; we have not to travel far to get at it ; it is round about us, insidiously, sometimes invisibly, always uncomfortably.

How, then, will David act in sorrow ? That is the great and abiding inquiry. Now that he is in distress we shall hear what wondrous tones there are in the throat of sorrow :—

"O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust" (ver. 1).

A direct appeal to heaven without any intervention. This bodes well for the young suppliant. Though a king be set against him he will cleave the king in two ; his sword shall go right through helmet and skull and body. He wins who speaks in this tone. To what God does he appeal ?—"my God." What does he offer his God ?—"my trust." There is a grand simplicity in this worship. This is not literary praise ; it is the praise of the rising, inspired, troubled, but confident heart. We pray when we are in sorrow—somewhat jerkingly, incoherently, impetuously, but it is all prayer ; and sometimes when the quiet days come we gather up our rough and jagged sentences, often apparently so unrelated one to the other, and make music of them. The words that are startled out of the soul are words that might never flow from the artistic pen, but they will bear to be kept, to be looked upon in after days, and to be brought into reconciliation and harmony ; and then we prize them as men prize the very throbbing of the heart.

Why pray so loudly, clearly, and distinctly ? Because the enemy is mighty, and he may "tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver" (ver. 2). If it

be a question merely between man and man, woe betide the weak! If the great battles of human existence are to be measured by the strength of the contending parties, virtue will be thrown down, discrowned, destroyed. But there are times when there must be a God: controversy would be intolerable; doubt would be out of place—not blasphemy against heaven, but blasphemy against the agonised heart. In these dark times we may be said to create a God. Judge these high questions in your high moods; there is no intellectual ladder that you can set up against this mystery, and by which you can climb your way into the presence of the throne: the heart can fly all the distance, counting the separating constellations nothing in the exercise of its infinite strength, created by infinite trust. What we have lost in all these matters may be described as the divine fire. We have thought to beat cold iron into shape. Iron will only obey the hammer and the hand when fire has undertaken to do the intermediate work: it is when the soul is on fire that we have no doubt about God. When we are prosperous, too highly indulged, even sated with luxury and plenty, we play the agnostic, the atheist, the speculative thinker; but when circumstances change, when the floor gives way, when the earth rocks, when the sun blinks, as if in mortal fear, and shuts out the day; when the child dies, and when all nature seems to be set in array against the progress of life,—then the real man within us will talk: the day of indifference will have departed, the time of agonised earnestness will have set in; and when agony is stinging the soul and darkness is accumulating itself upon the life like a burden, then let man say whether he is imbecile, whether he is unworthy of the related condition of things, and of the sovereignty which overrules and guides and crowns them all. We cannot listen to the cold man. We will not allow such a man to come into this holy place of the innermost thought; he cannot speak this language of the spirit; he is in a foreign universe; he must depart. Imagine not that religion is a subject to be talked over flippantly, easily, off-handedly, as if one opinion were as good as another, and as if the possessor of an opinion had come straight from the eternal throne with a special revelation; we can only understand these mysteries when we are plunged in sorrow, or when we are exalted with a pure

and even celestial joy. David's young heart was true to such principles as these. He did not undervalue the foe; he called him a "lion"; and he saw that he was no longer safe if God did not intervene.

Now he pleads his innocence :—

"O Lord my God, if I have done this ; if there be iniquity in my hands ; if I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me ; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy :) let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it ; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust " (vers. 3-7).

A wonderful image is this of "palming" iniquity. The conjurer lives by palming ; the conjurer's occupation would be gone if we could palm as well as he. We know not that there is something in his great hand ; on the contrary, he so plays with it and displays it that the idea never occurs to us that there is anything inside it : but for days he has studied how to hold the piece of paper or the thing he is playing with ; it is there, but nobody knows it. So the Psalmist says,—I am not palming iniquity, hiding it in the hollow of my hand, and then lifting up my hand as if in prayer ; there is my hand, open ; any man may touch it, and if he can find evil in that palm then let him strike, then let him crush me with just penalty. That is a grand appeal, and it is possible to every man. But who could bear to have both hands laid open and all the fingers separated that there might be nothing hidden ? Such hands may be lifted up in prayer. Who shall approach unto the hill of the Almighty and come nigh before God with prevailing intercession ? "He that hath clean hands." Here again is youthful frankness, youthful confidence. Were not we better in our youth than we are in our advancing life ? Was there not a time when the dewy rose typified our moral beauty and purity ? Were we not once conscious of having wronged no man ? But is not life a growing complication ? and when we have not done the straight and direct wrong, have we not in some way gone round about and come in from a great distance and related ourselves to some form of injustice, unkindness, wickedness ? These are searching questions ; they bring the soul up to judgment, and they allow the soul to pass sentence on itself. Who would not be young again ? Who would not accept the poet's suggestion to go back

by his yesterdays and die a little child? We love to hear David's young eloquence. He has no doubt of his integrity in this particular matter. Not only so, his position is not negative; there is a parenthesis in the fourth verse that is a high commendation: "Yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy,"—not only have I done no wrong, I have done actual good; I have seen my enemy in distress, yea, in great and thick perplexity, and when there was no man to help him I have gone and completed the extrication. Yet now am I the object of envy, jealousy, and evil bodings. Let them prove what they say. It is envy that is operating in the soul. If the charge were direct, and, so to say, tangible, so that I could get hold of it, I would handle it like a man; but it is a look, an exclamation, a sign with meaning in it, a shrug suggestive; I cannot get hold of that: "If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; . . . let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust." I am not the man to shrink from consequences, but I demand the proof; I defy the criticism; I am ready for the result. Purity is always courageous. "The righteous are bold as a lion." Not so the wicked: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." A leaf, crisp in the autumn time, fell upon the path the wicked man was treading, and he ran away as if a wolf had been loosed upon his track. Do not defy where the morality is not equal to the occasion, for such defiance but aggravates the guilt it was intended to conceal. Be of a right mind towards God. Let the purpose of life be on the whole sound, good, and upward, and then leave your enemies in the hands of God.

David presents a view of the case which is full of noble meaning. He presents the case as that of an innocent man being delivered by the Lord, saved from the rage of his enemies; and then he pictures the whole congregation of the people compassing the deliverer about; and he adds:—

"For their sakes therefore return thou on high" (v. 7).

The meaning is: these people are looking on; they are wondering at me and about the treatment of which I am the subject; if thou wilt come and deliver me and magnify my cause, vindicating my

innocence, all these people will compass thee about with songs; they will worship thee and bless thee because thou hast shown thyself to be on the side of the righteous. Perhaps this was a selfish view, but who can escape selfishness altogether? It follows us about: it is our very self. Yet there is a truth in this method of depicting the case. The good will rejoice with the good. Wherever a good man is delivered, promoted, set on high above the rage of those who are against him, he is not left there in solitude; the whole congregation takes up the hymn, praises God with a loud voice, says: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." So through his providences God brings honour and glory to his throne.

David had no difficulty in invoking a tremendous punishment upon his enemies. But the language must be judged by the times in which it was employed. Not only so, every man has his own language. In a sense there is a common tongue, but in another sense there is a private and individual tongue. You must know the speaker before you can understand the speech. The man explains the mystery that is round about him. Could we be but one day with some men whom we now wonder about and accuse of inconsistency and eccentricity, we should see the whole explanation, and give confidence where we now perhaps accord but doubtful trust. There is a key which opens every man's character. If you do not get the key you are doing the man an injustice in trying to understand him otherwise. You have not the key of the gate; you cannot climb over it, you cannot open it except with the key, and without the key you stand back and misconstrue and misrepresent and misjudge the gate altogether; whereas if you had but that one little key the lock would answer it in a moment, and the gate almost open of itself, and beyond it there would be liberty and security and the joy of protective friendship. So it is with language. David's language was very strong; but David was a poet, and a Hebrew poet—a poet of poets. All the poetry that had gone before him was but as a pedestal on which he stood to lift himself and his art into a nobler elevation. We must not, therefore, judge David's language, especially when he is imprecatory, with our critical notions of propriety and measure. No other terms would

have expressed his then feeling. Were he with us now, none would be so sweet in song, none so tender in prayer. Why, even in his day he sang. He concludes this complaint against Cush the Benjamite—the black man—with a determination to sing. The seventeenth verse says :—

“I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high.”

The psalm comes in with a tone of sorrow and loneliness, but it goes out with cymbals and dances, and songs and utterances of triumph. We thought in the earlier part of the psalm that David had never sung in his life, or if he had, he certainly would never sing again. He seems to write himself out of his misery, as men now pray themselves out of their trouble. When the prayer begins, the listener says, “How heavily loaded is that heart with sorrow! Surely that life is distressed beyond all possibility of recovery! Oh how sad and mournful and pensive the utterance of that heart!” And lo! the man talks over his case with God, goes into critical detail about it, mentions everything he can recollect; and the tone subtly changes all the while, and behold, at the last, the man is singing: the prayer has blossomed into a song, and he who began with supplication ended with praise. So it may be in our life: there is room enough, enemies enough there are no doubt, and difficulties apparently innumerable and insurmountable. Never under-estimate these difficulties. You cannot lecture a man out of sorrow. Encourage him rather to go over his sorrow, to mention it syllable by syllable, letter by letter; and when he has continued the story a long time, ask him if he cannot recollect something more, even more deeply distressing in its nature. Encourage him to tell all that is in his heart. Be good listeners. It soothes poor misery hearkening to her tale. Ask her to tell it over again; ask if she is quite sure that you heard the statement correctly; and by this sympathetic cross-examination, by this companionship of soul, you will extract the sorrow; and the heart, without any exhortation from the listener, will begin to recover itself, to take down its harp from the willows; and you, who entered into a house of mourning, shall find yourself presently at a wedding feast, swinging round in infinite delight in the sacred dance before the Lord, because the rain is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds has come.

Psalm viii.

[NOTE.—One critic has called this a lyric echo of the first chapter of Genesis. The best critics do not doubt the Davidic authorship. The word "Gittith" in the title is rendered by the LXX. and Vulgate "for the wine-presses." Another derivation makes it a kind of flute. Other critics think that the most probable explanation connects it with Gath, the Philistine town. According to a Talmudic paraphrase, "upon Gittith" should be read, "on the *kinnor* which was brought from Gath," thus making it a kind of Philistine lute, as there was an Egyptian flute and a Doric lyre. It is not supposed that the title has any reference to the subject. We learn here what is nature, and what is law; what is degeneracy and breach of law; and that God has ordained for himself, in the unconscious praise of their Creator from the mouths of babes and sucklings, a stronghold against the noisy clamour of apostate men, who rebel against the divine order, and lay upon God the blame of their own aberration from his order.]

1. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

2. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

3. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

5. For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

6. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

7. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

8. The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

9. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

GOD'S GLORY IN THE HEAVENS.

THE object of this psalm is to magnify the name of God. Whatever else is in the psalm is pictorial and of the nature of detail. The one great object of the utterance is to praise and magnify the name of the Lord. The name is the Lord. We

have debased names. We have used them arbitrarily. They express our fancy, or they connect us in some way with family history; but they do not incarnate the soul's innermost quality and thought. They ought to do so. Names ought not to be lightly bestowed; the name should be the man. Beware, therefore, how names are attached to children, which names have been stigmatised in history; for suggestion is very subtle in its operation. Beware, too, how great names are thrown away upon possibly unworthy objects. Great names are not to be bandied about, thrown from one to another, until all their glory is emptied out and all their power is wasted. Names are realities in the Scriptures, in many places. Here and again there have been great misapplications of names, but the meaning was that the name should be the man. The name of God, therefore, is God himself. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." You cannot touch the name, and leave the God untouched. What exercise can be more edifying, more spiritually expanding and comforting, than to praise or magnify the name of the Lord? Let us watch the process in the psalm. It is full of simple beauty, partly astronomical, partly pastoral.

It does us good to go to nature. The Psalmist considered the "heavens," "the moon, and the stars." Good nature! sweet mother! What medicine is like her smile, or her breath, or her benediction! What a sanctuary is on the top of her mountains; what altars are in the sighs of her winds; what immortality, as it were, breathes across her seas! "Lift up thine eyes," said God to a dejected one, "and behold." It does us good to look upward: there is a healing influence in space—its vastness, its purity, its solemnity. What can they be who have never seen the sky? There are millions of men who have never seen it, because they have never looked at it; it seems to be no business of theirs; they seem to have no relation to it; they forget that if there were no sky, there could be no earth; if there were no sun, there could be no food to eat. But men do not connect things; they are not logical; they do not perceive sequences, and trace results to origins. And many are so shut up that they cannot see the sky, only little blue strips of it, with space enough for a star or two; but the great city of stars—the infinite

metropolis of light, they have never seen. If they could see—really see it—they would lose all their care and fear, and their tears would be but part of the common rain that makes the earth glad. But men will not look up; they live with inclined heads; and who ever saw anything in the earth but a grave? The earth is not worth thinking about, except as a part of something else. It is the tiniest little place you can imagine; it is a mere button of a thing—a little whirling speck which never would be missed, they tell us, were it to go spark out. What have we to do with the earth? It gives us a foothold, and supplies us with certain means of bodily living; but it is when we “consider” the “heavens,” and “the moon and the stars,” and the whole host of night, that we are lifted up into new dignity and restfulness. We should think more of nature. The green field should be more precious to us—not because it is one acre and a half in extent, but because it is verdant, fresh, living, throbbing with ten thousand pulses, waiting to be cultivated, waiting to help our needy life. Who ever brought sorrow back from the mountain-top? Many a man has carried sorrow up the hill; we have watched him, and seen his bent form, and said: How heavy is the burden he carries! Do not speak to him, for the mere answering of a question will only add to the weight he sustains. He has no breath to spare; let him alone. Mark how he toils, trudges, stoops, sighs! Still, let him alone. He goes higher and higher, and great mother-nature says, “Ten more steps, and you are at the top;” and when he reaches the summit, and looks round and sees what a wide sky it is, and how pure and how musical, he stretches himself; he is being transformed; he has thrown off ten years now, presently ten more, and he says: I will take heart again; things are not so gloomy as they looked down at the foot of the hill. Behold, God is here, and I knew it not! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven! Now see how he comes down—leaping, singing, as young as ever. He thought to die on the mountain-top, and lo! God has sent him back to take hold of the plough with both hands, to go into the field of war and fight like a man. Why brood? Why gather your knees into the fire and warm yourself in patches, instead of going out and making yourself warm by the motion of the whole frame,

and drinking in fire from the sun of the heavens? Many persons have come to me in religious dejection, and I have always ordered them—they thought, perhaps, imperiously—to the mountains, to the green fields; and have sent them maying and daisy-gathering, and they have come back from the buttercup-field as glad as I was, and sometimes twice as strong. We have despised nature. She is God's minister, apostle, the medium through which he pours infinite gospels, if we had ears to hear them.

The Psalmist would be unjustly treated if we abandoned him, as it were, here. David makes a religious use of nature: "Thy heavens . . . thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained." It does look as if they might have been made by God. In truth, now we think about it, there is nothing startling in the suggestion. Could we have lifted up any one of these planets into its place? Have we span enough in our little arms to stretch out the heavens like a tent? Now that some one says, in the night season, when all the stars are out, "God made them," it seems rational to believe it; the making of them would seem to be worthy of a God. How harmonic in movement! how calm! Always giving away their light, and never keeping a single gleam of it for themselves; never coming into collision one with the other, but whirling, circling, coursing, never ceasing—millions of them. When one says, in a period of contemplation, "My Father made them all," he does not seem to be much of a fanatic, or an enthusiast, or a word-rhyming poet, but a man of sense and gravity, and responsible thoughtfulness. "An undevout astronomer is mad," said the author of the "Night Thoughts," and that sentiment has never been disproved. We are not called upon to look at the heavens furtively, for a moment only, but we are called upon to "consider thy heavens," to measure them, weigh them, traverse them, so far as we can, and put together, as it may be revealed, their purpose, their design, their issue.

It is very notable what use is made of the same heavens and moon and stars by men who have been in the company of Jesus Christ. In David we have wonder. Peter, the rude fisherman, who has been with Christ, comes and looks at them, and he says, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and

the elements shall melt with fervent heat." This is the teaching of great David's greater Son. He, too, would have us consider the fowls of the air, and the flowers of the field, and all the handiwork of God; but not to rest there, not to be mere naturalists, flower-gatherers, and star-gazers: he would have us reason upward. If God can do this, he can do more; this is a worthy intermediate revelation, but not a worthy final disclosure of God. If this, the beginning, be so beautiful, who can forecast the culmination, when the true idea stands revealed?

David founds an argument upon his contemplation of nature:—

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (ver. 4).

The Psalmist is not instituting a humiliating contrast between man and nature. The fifth verse proves this:—

"For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels" [R.V. "God"], "and hast crowned him with glory and honour."

Man is the second name on the register; God signs first, and, passing the pen to man, he signs second. "Thou hast made him a little lower than God." Sometimes he seems to be almost God. His face reddens with an inward light, and his voice trembles under an emotion which expresses things infinite. He contemplates nature to no purpose who looks upon it until he begins to feel his own littleness only. That is not the right method of reasoning about nature. There is nothing in all the heavens that can compare, so far as it is material, with the tiniest babe that coos in its mother's arms. We must reason upward from nature to man, not downward from outward and material frameworks to man. Man is greater than all he sees. Picture an observer looking at a great hill. He looks at it and says, "What is man?" Why, there is nothing in all that hill that man cannot grind to powder and throw away, scatter in the wind or sink in the sea. Man does look little in stature when he stands against the Andes or the great Himalayan group. He feels physically small. But suddenly he says: After all, what is that hill? I will climb it, stand upon the top of it, plant a banner there, and call myself conqueror. So he may. There is no hill in all the world that man cannot climb, or cast down, and thus humiliate.

All things shall contribute towards securing a realisation of

his greatness as meant by God. Man was meant to have "dominion":—

"Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (ver. 6).

Now the Psalmist puts the right view of the case. Everything is under the foot of man. "Thou madest him to have dominion." "Dominion" is a far-reaching word; we have not yet thrown our measuring-line upon it and realised all its suggestion and inspiration. Is there not a stirring sometimes in the heart, which means: I was meant to be king; I was meant to be master; I was meant to exercise dominion—dominion over the enticements of matter; it was intended that I should be able to say to the most fascinating spectacles that could appeal to me—Stand back! Man was meant to have dominion over the satisfactions of sense. Say, is it not quite heroic, in some small way at least, that a man shall be able to say to a habit: I have done with thee; you do not leave this day fortnight—you leave *now*! That is what God means man to be and to do in regard to everything that is not of the nature of God himself. It is useless, and worse than useless, even pitiful and weak, for a man to say that some habit has got such a hold of him that he cannot shake it off. That doctrine must never be allowed. Such a man must go to his friends, and say: I cannot do it alone, but you must help me: lock me up; build walls seven feet thick all round me, and help me, for the devil is hard upon me. A man who is so habit-ridden must not trust the case to himself or to his own handling; he must say: I have uncrowned myself, I have lost the charter by which I hold my manhood and my life: take pity upon me, take care of me; do not consider that I have any will in this matter—oh, save me! And to others a word of caution should be spoken to this effect: Before the habit gets such hold upon you, be sure that you secure the upper hand over the habit. Man was made to have "dominion," in the largest sense. It is well to put our very habits through a process of discipline, supposing the habit to be not altogether wicked. It is well for every man to say to it: I am going to have nothing to do with you for one whole month; stand back until I call you. Habits take liberties. They are weaving webs around the life when the life is not suspecting the operation. It is well for a

man to say about his eating and drinking and sleeping : I am going to alter all of you ; a new bill of directions shall guide my life for a month ; every hour shall be changed, and every habit shall be driven out until I ask it to resume its place. Thus the man is exercising his right ; he is realising the domination which God meant him to exercise over all things—"all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field ; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (vers. 7, 8). Is it worth while that we should be able to hold all these things in dominion if we cannot hold ourselves in check ? The great aim of every life should be self-control. A man should say : I will not speak to-day, nor eat, nor go abroad ; I will keep myself in subjection, lest after having preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. Bitter word, humbling word ! A "castaway"—something thrown off, without the thrower heeding where it goes ; it may have been here or there, or over the brink into the great abyss ; the man who threw it knows not, cares not, where it is : the thing thrown is a "castaway."

Is there not in all this musical reasoning of the Psalmist a suggestion of man's immortality ? Do we not feel, after reading such a contemplation and taking part in it, that the man who could do all this could do more ? Is there not something within us which says : This cannot be the end of a man who can consider God's heavens, the moon and the stars ; this cannot be the end of a creature a little lower than God, crowned with glory and honour ? God does not make such crowns to throw them away ; he does not bestow such honours to follow them with contempt. Immortality is here by implication. The very greatness of the man is a proof that he was not meant for extinction. An awful irony it would be that God should create such a being, and, after all his poetry and reasoning and prayer, should allow that same being to fall away into nothingness ! This cannot be. The high religiousness of this psalm is no loss to man in any aspect. Religiousness does not disqualify for business. A man is not a whit the less keen in mental penetration because he has been lost in religious awe and meditation and worship. He will come back from the altar a stronger man, being able to see further than he ever saw before, and to speak with an authority which he

never could claim under other circumstances ; having sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will be master. There can be no master but the good man in the long run. There will be semi-masteries, miniature dominations, temporary successes—men who wear the clothes of success and honour, men who may make in tinsel the crowns of gold ; but they will go down, and at the last there shall only one man stand upon the earth, crowned and honoured—the good man, the upright in heart, the believer in Jesus Christ, the man who has been crucified with the Son of God. All others shall be lost, burned by the lightning, when God flingeth its flash over the whole heaven.

NOTE.

SE'LAH (סֶלָה). This word, which is only found in the poetical books of the Old Testament, occurs seventy-one times in the Psalms, and three times in Habakkuk. In sixteen Psalms it is found once, in fifteen twice, in seven three times, and in one four times—always at the end of a verse, except in Ps. lv. 19 [20], lvii. 3 [4], and Hab. iii. 3, 9, where it is in the middle, though at the end of a clause. All the Psalms in which it occurs, except eleven (iii. vii. xxiv. xxxii. xlviii. l. lxxxii. lxxxiii. lxxxvii. lxxxix. cxliii.), have also the musical direction, “to the Chief Musician,” (comp. also Hab. iii. 19); and in these exceptions we find the words מִזְמֹר, *mizmôr* (A. V. “Psalm”), Shiggaion, or Maschil, which sufficiently indicate that they were intended for music. Besides these, in the titles of the Psalms in which Selah occurs, we meet with the musical terms Alamoth (xlv.), Altaschith (lvii. lix. lxxv.), Gittith (lxxx. lxxxiv.), Mahalath Leannoth (lxxxviii.), Michtam (lvii. lix. lx.), Neginah (lxi.), Neginoth (iv. liv. lv. lxxvii. lxxvi.; comp. Hab. iii. 19), and Shushan-eduth (lx.); and on this association alone might be formed a strong presumption that, like these, Selah itself is a term which had a meaning in the musical nomenclature of the Hebrews. What that meaning may have been is now a matter of pure conjecture.

A few opinions may be noticed as belonging to the history of the subject. Michaelis, in despair at being unable to assign any meaning to the word, regarded it as an abbreviation, formed by taking the first or other letters of three other words (*Suppl. ad Lex. Hebr.*), though he declines to conjecture what these may have been, and rejects at once the guess of Meibomius, who extracts the meaning *da capo* from the three words which he suggests. For other conjectures of this kind, see Eichhorn's *Bibliothek*, v. 545. Mattheson was of opinion that the passages where Selah occurred were repeated either by the instruments or by another choir: hence he took it as equal to *ritornello*. Herder regarded it as marking a change of key; while Paulus Burgensis and Schindler assigned to it no meaning, but looked upon it as an enclitic word used to fill up the verse. Buxtorf (*Lex. Hebr.*) derived it from סָלַח, *sâlâh*, to spread, lay low: hence used as a sign to lower the voice, like *piano*. Augusti (*Pract. Einl. in d. Ps.* p. 125) thought it was an exclamation, like *hallelujah*! and the same view was taken by the late Prof. Lee (*Heb. Gr.* §243, 2) who classes it among the interjections, and renders it *praise*! “For my own part,” he says, “I believe it to be descended from the root סָלַח, ‘he blessed,’ etc., and used not unlike the word *amen*, or the *doxology*, among ourselves.”—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

PRAYER.

THIS is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven ! Thou dost surprise us by thy presence, even though we know the whole earth is thine, thou Father of all. We appear to come suddenly upon thee, and to find thy throne where we did not expect it. Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Even in thine house thou canst be greater than our imagination : it is not only our Father's house, but it is our Father's command that the best robe be brought forth and a ring of heaven, and that the feast of love be spread. We cannot follow thee in all the way of thy love. Thou art always doing more than our imagination led us to expect. We are always in the presence of thy great care and tender mercy ; yet now and again it surprises us by some new beauty, some deeper pathos, some profounder assurance of fatherly regard. We are glad to be in thy house, for it is as a chamber of banqueting. Thy banner over us is Love : thine invitation is, Eat and drink abundantly O beloved : at thy feast there is more at the end than there was at the beginning. This is a miracle of love, a marvel—not to be comprehended—of compassion and bounteousness. Thou hast always been patient with us : thou mightest have crushed our infirmity ; thou mightest have carried us away as with a flood ; in the night-time thou mightest have caused our little life to disappear, so that in the morning it could no more be found : but like as a father pitieth his children so thou hast pitied us in our feebleness and in our low estate ; thou hast counted nothing belonging to us unworthy of thy notice—the very hairs of our head are all numbered. As for thy patience, thy longsuffering, thy watching at the door of the heart, and thine attendance upon us—what words can express our conception of these ? We are lost in wonder, love, and praise ! We cannot keep pace with God. Behold, there is no number that can set forth his mercy ; neither is there any reckoning that can represent his compassion ; the sand upon the seashore and all the stars in the brightest night-time are as nothing compared with the infinite loving-kindness of God. We think of the Cross, and remember thy love : by the Cross we are saved ; by the Cross we find pardon, peace, and a sure expectation of heaven. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. We pray for one another. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. May every righteous man pray not only for himself, but for all the household of God and all the household of humanity. Give grace unto them who specially need some ministry from heaven, because of manifold temptation, or great perplexity, or intolerable sorrow. Grant unto those who need direction in the wilderness a voice that shall say to them, **This is the way ;**

walk in it, and be assured of the presence of God ; his rod and his staff will comfort you. To those who have been bereaved or are in circumstances of special distress, send angels from heaven, who shall speak of thy care, love, and wisdom, and the meaning of all the chastening providences of life. Be with those who have left us for a season to go afar, that they may renew their friendships, or pursue their business, or inquire into interests covered by their love. Be with all who are in peril on the sea : make the sea as solid land, and the great winds do thou calm into healthful and peaceful breezes, and bring all travellers to their desired haven. Accept the thanksgiving of those who remember thy care with love and praise this day ; thou hast raised up some from the bed of affliction ; thou hast re-kindled the lamp of hope in some houses ; thou hast given joy to some lives that were fast despairing,—these are thy gifts, Parent of good, Father of all spirits. We take them as from God ; we bless the hand that gives them, and we ask to show our gratitude by renewed and ever-enlarging service. Let thy peace be upon us. Hover over us, O Spirit of purity, Spirit of peace. Take all fear away ; make us glad in the sanctuary of God, and give us to feel that here is the shining of the bright and morning Star, here is the fruit of the tree of life, here we find God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, in all the plentitude of grace. Amen.

Psalm ix.

[NOTE.—In the Septuagint and the Vulgate, Psalms ix. and x. are combined into one. It is supposed that Psalm xxxiii. had apparently by mistake been joined to Psalm xxxii. before the collection was made, but Psalms ix. and x. had not then been separated. From a literary point of view the psalm was originally alphabetical, partaking of the nature of an acrostic. The title is “Muth-Labben,” the most perplexing of all titles. No conjecture of the meaning of the Hebrew as it stands has been deemed satisfactory. The alphabetical arrangement is begun in its completest form ; every clause of the first stanza begins with *Aleph*.]

DAVID'S CONCEPTION OF GOD.

THE Psalms must be something more than merely personal in their utterance and in their meaning. Many of them must be regarded as moral, and therefore general, rather than personal, and therefore limited. We propose to treat this psalm according to that idea, and mark how noble it becomes, and how entirely and loftily it expresses the thought and feeling of all ages. Regard the author of this psalm, not so much as one person, as an incarnation of the Spirit of Righteousness—then the psalm becomes ineffable in its comforting thought. Imagine the Spirit of Righteousness misunderstood, ill-treated, yet patient, long-suffering, waiting for the final evolution of God's purpose ; and

then gladdening, singing, rejoicing, magnifying God's providence in a loud song, and calling upon the nations to witness how wondrous is the working of the divine thought in all human ages.

Has not Righteousness often been in great danger? This would seem to be impossible. How can that which is right ever be in peril? The answer is in facts, not in reasoning. Right has never been out of danger, virtue has never had a secure dwelling-place upon this earth,—that is, a dwelling-place removed from the possibility of violation or unholy trespass. One would say that men would know music when they hear it, and would respond to its tender appeals and sacred persuasion; but that imagining is false,—that is to say, it is contradicted by facts innumerable and stubborn. Men have been deaf even to music; men have become as adders for deafness even when sweet gospels have been preached by lips anointed from heaven. It is no marvel, then, that Righteousness should be in trouble, in perplexity, suffering loss, mourning under many a painful stroke, baffled by many a providence which seems to reflect upon itself. Such is the history of the world:—Righteousness in trouble, in danger, embarrassed, perplexed, disheartened.

But Righteousness is not a limited force, something measurable in itself and calculable as to its immediate effects. Anything of that quality or degree which appears to be righteousness is but a speculation, an attempt, an attitude. The true righteousness is associated with the infinite power of God. When Righteousness is in trouble, God himself may be said, by an allowable accommodation of language, to be in distress: it is not a little human cause that is embarrassed, or that has lost its way in some maze of difficulty; it is the living God who is opposed, defied, condemned. But does it lie within the scope of the finite to mock and defy the Infinite? The question is of great importance in speculation, but how can the question be put by any one who has studied his own nature and is familiar with all the marvels of his own moral constitution? This little life is a continual battle with the Eternal; this part-life wishes to become the Whole-Life, and is prepared to eat of any tree the fruit of which will make it as God. On the other hand, how comforting is the thought, how infinite

in its support, that whenever right is opposed it is God who is defied! Whenever goodness is affronted it is the Spirit of goodness that is insulted: the offence does not lie as between man and man, and as between one human thought and another human thought; where goodness is hindered, perverted, or injured, the blow of injury is dealt, as it were, upon the very face of God.

What does the outworking of this truth come to? It comes to this effect: that Righteousness rejoices not in merely personal victories but in the triumph of truth. The first part of the fourth verse seems to be merely personal, but the second clause of the verse is universal. Read: "For thou hast maintained my right and my cause;" there we may put so much emphasis upon the personal pronoun as to make this a merely individual instance, as if God had specialised one man as against many men, without inquiring into the merits of the case. The second clause reads:—"Thou satest in the throne judging right." That is the universal tone. Not—God sitting in the throne selecting favourites, distributing prizes and rewards according to some arbitrary law; but God sitting in the throne judging right, whoever was upon one side or the other of the controversy. The whole encounter is delivered from the narrow limitation of personal misunderstanding and individual combat, and is made one of rectitude, and God is indicated as taking part with the right. This is comfort; this, in fact, is the only true and lasting solace. If there were anything narrow, in the merely personal sense, in the government and providence of God, we should be thrown into unrest and faithlessness, or the most humiliating fear; but make the providence of God turn upon right, and then every man who does right, or who wishes to be right and to do right, may lift up his eyes to heaven and say: My help cometh from the everlasting hills; I will bear all difficulties bravely, with a really manful and sweet patience, because in the end right will be vindicated and crowned. Right is not with any one set of persons; right is not a possession guaranteed to any one kind of office in the Church; it is a universal term; it rises like a universal altar, within whose shadow poor men and needy men, as well as rich and mighty men, may be gathered in the security of prayer and in the gladness of assured hope.

Look at the revelation of God which this psalm discloses. Let us ask the question, What was the Old Testament view of God? This psalm may be taken as supplying a pertinent and noble reply. Not only is there a human condition outlined here—a condition of great distress, humiliation, and fear—but in the night-time of the soul's woe the Psalmist vindicates the altar at which he worships, by a delineation of God, grand in conception and sublime in language.

In what God is the Psalmist trusting? In a God associated with marvels, wonders, surprises of power and of love: "I will show forth all thy marvellous works" (ver. 1). The universe did not appear to be little to the Psalmist. There is nothing contemptuous in the tone of this man as he reviews the course of providence and marks the ordinances of nature. His reverence is touched, his veneration exalts him in worship. No man who retains his reverence in all its integrity and nobleness ever really goes down in moral power: his religion is his force. The moment he takes an unworthy view of God every pulse dies out of him; there is no more pith left in the muscle: but veneration sustains the noblest strength. This is the kind of sentiment which is full of nourishing ministry and influence. God is marvellous in works; therefore he must be marvellous in personality: about him there is nothing little in the sense of the mean, contemptible, or the worthless: everywhere, in blade of grass, in bird's wing, in great stars and planets, there is wonder, there is wonder upon wonder, a continuity of marvellousness, a very infinity of wisdom and power. Let a man seize that idea and walk in the light of that thought, and even in the night-time he will have songs, and in the hour of affliction he will have comfort, and when the fig-tree does not blossom he will have a store of fruit laid up which no hand can take away.

Then the Psalmist's conception of God brings with it an inspiring and subduing awe. By what name is the Lord called in this psalm? In the second verse he is described as "thou Most High." Language can go no higher. It formulates its little superlative, and then falls back like a weary bird that can fly no higher in the direction of God's majesty. The sense of height

ennobles men : hence it does the soul good to look steadily up into the firmament—the arch immeasurable, the sphere boundless, in which the very idea of height becomes itself a kind of natural religion. Both ideas are correct—namely, the idea that brings God down into the region of human language, wherein we find endearing words ; hence he is Father, Shepherd, Friend, Companion : and the other idea, which appears to be in direct contrast, is equally right—the idea which represents him as the “Most High,” the Eternal, the Unknowable, the infinitely glorious Lord God,—the idea that baffles language, that pours contempt on noblest poetry, and enthrones itself on the right hand of the Majesty on high. These ideas ought never to be vitally dissociated. We must not live too much on the side of God’s revelation which is narrowed by images and names of a merely human, social, and pastoral kind ; nor must we live too exclusively on the side of God’s nature which is represented by exalted terms, lofty and unutterable language, expressive of attributes incomprehensible. We must unite the two sides : now we must be reverently familiar with God, coming nigh unto him and speaking with him as friend to friend ; and yet all the while we must be stirred by the feeling that this is a privilege accorded to us : a miracle of love, that we should, so to say, touch the Infinite and yet live, speak to God and yet be but men. But this experience is not to be defined in words ; the heart must grow up into this joyous consciousness. There is no irreverence in the familiarity which calls God Father ; and there is no servility in the homage which prostrates itself before him, unable to look at the lustre of his majesty.

The Psalmist’s God was everlasting :—“The Lord shall endure for ever” (ver. 7). We cannot do without that element of duration. Somehow it appeals to us with a force unique. Anything that can wither, die, or undergo vital change brings with it more or less of suspicion when it offers us solace and inspiration and strength in all the course of our life ; the soul says, This may be a broken reed, this may not be the same to-morrow it is to-day ; who can tell what transitions this offered love may pass through : what security is there as to its duration ? The Bible supplies the element of everlastingness. The Bible, indeed,

makes a good deal of that argument :—“ Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever ;” “ I am the Lord, I change not.” Heavens change, great firmaments may be rolled together like a scroll ; but God is the same : his years fail not. When faithful men die, and virtuous causes are troubled, we will look unto the years of the Most High. Into this thought, too, we must grow. As age comes on we feel the value of durability, continuity, or everlastingness,—the quantity that never changes, the abiding force : and to have the idea that that abiding force is associated with right, and always with right, is the supreme comfort of religious faith or sanctified hope.

But here we could not stop. This would be like living amidst rocks of incalculable height, but so stern and inhospitable as to weary us by the very monotony of their greatness. Such scenes must be visited but occasionally ; it is well to know that they are accessible ; but taking the year all round, with its varieties of experience and service, we need something other and quite different. This other element is supplied by this very psalm. The flowers are none the less lovely because of the mountains. Read the ninth verse in explanation of the thought :—

“ The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.”

Now the psalm becomes most human, now the charioteer alights, and we are able to join the king and speak a common tongue. It is not given to every man to enter into great moods of exultation, or to follow the language of majestic poetry ; it is not every wing that can keep company with the flying few ; but every now and then the great Bible poets come down to the earth to gather us all up into a holy brotherhood, to speak some word that children can understand, that mothers can apply, that patient heroes can comprehend and utilise. The ninth verse will live and be quoted when many a grander utterance will be but distantly and solemnly referred to. We might write these words, and keep them as a physician in the sick-room,—a silent, compassionate, divine physician. These words could be carried to the bed of sickness :—“ The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” That motto will bear carrying away in our hearts whenever we have a worthy

battle to fight; that motto will bear to be quoted and relied upon in times of great distress and desolation and loss. How wonderfully tender is the Old Testament! Who can gather together all the loving words in the first Testament? We are ready to quote the pensively tender and compassionate words of the New Testament: we think of Jesus and his being a revelation of the Father: there we are perfectly right; but we must not forget that the Old Testament had its tender side. What wondrous words of love have been breathed heavenward by the oldest saints! "Love" is not exclusively a New Testament word. When a man stood up to tempt Christ and ask the first commandment of the law, or what he was to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him to quote the Old Testament, and in quoting the Old Testament the man was obliged to say—"Thou shalt love." And again the second commandment is like the first:—"Thou shalt love." Now, whatever these terms of sentiment may be, here is the grand historical fact, that the Old Testament men in all trouble, difficulty, perplexity, and sorrow represented God as tender, approachable, long-suffering, marked by loving-kindness and tender mercy.

"For the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever" (ver. 18).

There is a great space created in the Old Testament for the poor man. The list of guests at God's table is never completed until the needy man has a line, as it were, all to himself. The Old Testament, not less than the New, is the friend of the virtuous poor, is the refuge and defence of souls whose main purpose is right, though outward circumstances may seem to indicate divine displeasure. Observe, this is not mere poverty. A man is not honoured simply because he has no money, or simply because he lives in needy circumstances; the need of his circumstances must express the poverty of his spirit. Indeed, the Revised Version reads—"The expectation of the meek shall not perish for ever." So we are not dealing with a name which refers to merely outward circumstances, but with a name which relates to a condition of soul, an attitude of spirit towards God; this will destroy a great many sophisms, and cut up by the roots a great many gourds to which men have been vainly trusting. No man is lost because he is rich, or saved because he is poor;

poverty and wealth must have their counterparts in the soul as to its self-renunciation and its richness of faith and love.

Then, again, the colour changes. Wondrous in colour is this holy psalm : God so great, yet God so accessible ; the heathen so mighty, yet the heathen so frail—one day lifting up their heads in pride and tyranny, another day sunk down in the pit that they made, and their feet taken in the net which they hid ; now the needy are praying, and now the wicked are cursed ; but “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (ver. 17). Read : The wicked shall be returned, or turned back to Sheol, or to punishment, or to condemnation. Read the text as if that were the right place for wickedness, the very native place of all evil. Make of this place what we may, put the thought into what variety of language may be possible, here remains the fact that wickedness is always disapproved, condemned, punished. Why, then, trouble ourselves about mere words, about the new setting of terms, or the re-colouring of language ? We never can change the thought that God is against wickedness, that as to iniquity God is a consuming fire ; he is never complacent with any badness, with any form of falsehood. That fact cannot be changed. If that fact could be changed, the throne of God itself would be overturned. Whilst we may be discussing the doctrine of hell, whilst we may be changing the word “hell” for terms which hardly smite us with so pitiless a severity, we must never forget that the end of wickedness is perdition ; the wages of sin is death ; iniquity cannot prosper ; though hand join in hand, yet iniquity shall be brought to ruin. Why, then, imagine that we find comfort in the softening of mere terms, when a voice within us says : It is right that evil should be punished, that wickedness should be condemned ? What we have to do is to attend to the substantial fact. We cannot escape by etymology, or by grammatical construction, or by any critical legerdemain. Written upon the face of the universe is this tremendous fact, that no man can sin against God and live, no man can be wicked and yet be justified in his wickedness ; no excuse can stand as against the accusation of God.

Here, then, is a psalm which is not at all limited by mere

personality, which sets forth a series of circumstances possible in every age, and which presents a delineation of God which may be retained amid all the ages as literally true, beautifully expressive, tenderly answering to every word and line of the portraiture drawn by Jesus Christ himself. The psalm is poetry. That is true; but poetry is the highest doctrine, the highest form of reality. Poetry is fact on fire. We must be poetical in the sense of wishing for terms larger than any we know, words more elastic than any we can command, to express our Christian consciousness of God's greatness, nearness, tenderness. What is God to us? Is he associated with marvels? does his name inspire awe? is he everlasting, tender, open to pathetic appeals? does he distinguish between the righteous and the wicked? Then, indeed, have we the right conception of the Most High. But let this never be forgotten concerning God: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." How he can do this we can never understand. How sin can be forgiven transcends the imagination of man to conceive or explain. Forgiveness comes to us by revelation. We cannot forgive. We cannot even forgive one another, except in some intermediate and convenient sense, not in the metaphysical, spiritual, and eternal sense; simply because any offence that we may have to forgive is either so trivial as to be but a social annoyance, or so large that it transcends the personality of the parties and touches eternal laws. How God can forgive is not a problem in philosophy; the mere metaphysician can never solve that mystery, the heart conscious of sin must receive it, act upon it, adopt it, live and die in the faith of it. When the soul does this, seeing Christ as the medium of forgiveness and the cause of pardon, opening up moral possibilities which the imagination had never discovered, then is the Cross ineffably precious, then is that saying true: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." Do not ask any man to explain the words; they must be lived; they are bread eaten in secret, and they express themselves in hope, confidence, joy, and service, rather than in mere terms, which can balance controversies, or settle or silence the debates of men.

Psalm x.

THE BOASTING OF THE WICKED.

WE have already pointed out that in the Septuagint and the Vulgate, Psalms ix. and x. are combined into one.* This being the case, the authorship of the tenth psalm is clearly traceable to David. It has further been pointed out that the whole piece was originally alphabetical; our immediate business, however, is with the spiritual purport of the psalm itself.

The whole strain of the psalm is one of deep religious depression, and of lamentation over the condition of the poor and helpless. The first verse is full of sacred pathos:—

“Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?”

The conscious absence of God or even his conscious distance from the soul is no unfamiliar experience. It is something to know that the experience is of no modern origin, but that it seems to attach to the entire course of the spiritual life. The mourning which invests so many of the psalms with so deep a sadness is literally expressive of our own religious tumult and despair. Indeed, when we wish to give precise utterance to our deepest and saddest feelings, we seem instinctively to turn to the Psalms that we may find proper words. There is more religious instruction in this fact than would at first sight appear. It shows how truly the religious life of mankind is one under all conditions of time and space. There is the same God, the same alternating faith and doubt, the same bright hope and sudden darkness. We are thus united in our deepest experiences, however far we may be separated by circumstances of an incidental kind. The heart of man would seem to be most deeply one alike in trouble and in prayer. Such trouble, too, has its own peculiar place in spiritual education. It inspires the truest and noblest cry for

* See *ante*, p. 80.

the absent or distant God. But the particular idea of this verse would seem to be not so much a loss of consciousness of spiritual fellowship with God, as a deep and bitter feeling that the Lord has separated himself practically from all the affairs of men. The picture is of the strong oppressing the weak, and God, instead of coming into the battle to avenge injustice and assist helpless poverty, stands upon a distant hill that he may watch the fight from afar. The contest awakens the pity of David and yet does not seem to awaken the pity of God! Has not a similar experience occurred to ourselves? In innumerable instances have we felt that if God himself would only come near he might burn the wicked with a spark, and lift up the virtuous poor to the elevation which is worthy of their spiritual pureness. But affairs appear to go quite in another manner; it is as if men must fight out their own cause whilst the living God is a mere observer looking on from a great distance, and indeed hardly looking on at all. This last point indeed coincides with the grammar of the verse, for the literal rendering, according to Isaiah i. 15, would be, "Why hidest thou thine eyes in times of trouble?" In other words, Why dost thou wink at the wrongdoing of oppressors? Why not look straight at them with eyes of fire, and burn them as they madly pursue their infamous course? Whilst therefore it is profoundly true that there are times when the soul is conscious of the absence of God in a purely spiritual sense, it must not be overlooked that the writer of this verse is rather complaining that God is taking no active part in the battles and sorrows of mankind. The Psalmist asks—Why? It is a bitter question; it is a question forced out of the soul by distressing circumstances.

"The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth" (vers. 2, 3).

The grammar of these verses it is difficult to settle, but the moral purpose of them is perfectly distinct. The wicked man does not know the proper measure of his strength, his prosperity makes him proud, and his pride fills him with contempt in reference to the poor. His reasoning is basely carnal: he would say, Look at me and behold what my right hand has done, and

then look at the poor man in his vileness, and in that vileness see a proof of his incapacity and worthlessness: his hand is without skill, his eye is destitute of sagacity, and all his plans are marked by the feeblest childishness: surely a man so vile was made to be trampled upon, and in trampling upon him I am but carrying out in a human way what God himself is evidently doing in his mysterious providence. The speech of the wicked man concerning the poor thus aggravates its wickedness by a pretended piety. The wicked man would pretend to see in the poor man's poverty a proof of God's contempt; if the man were not poor he would be more respected in heaven, and because he is not respected in heaven it is evident to the wicked observer that he was not intended to be respected upon earth.

A very strong and vivid figure is that presented in the third verse. The wicked are represented as speaking praise to the lust of their own soul. When wicked people overwhelm the poor, they arise and address to their own souls rhetorical congratulations. They pour upon their own hearts eloquent tributes to their genius and strength. The literal idea is that of a villain addressing his vilest passions and congratulating them upon their satisfaction and triumph. An illustrative instance is found in the case of the rich man who told his soul that much goods had been laid up for many years and that the time of holiday and feasting had now come. The covetous man is represented in the text as blessing himself, which is exactly the idea of the parable of the rich man and his abundant harvests. The literal translation of "covetous" in the third verse is "robber." This is not only a grammatical change, it is a truly spiritual rendering. When we speak plain language to ourselves we shall not disguise the fact that covetousness is robbery. We speak now in modified language of covetous men being "close," "thrifty," "prudent," "worldly-wise," but these softened expressions must be indignantly driven away, and in their places there must stand the word so terrible but true, that the covetous man is a thief and a robber. The expression at the close of the third verse, "whom the Lord abhorreth," should be inverted and read, "who abhorreth the Lord." Many such expressions ought to be

inverted, and thus many a difficulty in regard to the divine nature would be removed. When we read of the Lord abhorring a man we may set it down as an absolute certainty that the man first abhorred the Lord. This true interpretation gets rid of the unholy and debasing notion that the Lord conceives particular prejudices against particular persons on grounds which are purely arbitrary. Set it down as a guiding fact, as indeed a key of interpretation, that wherever the Lord is said to be opposed to a man or nation, the act of hostility began on the human side. We can hardly determine whether the Psalmist is fixing his mind upon some merely dramatic personalities whom he describes by the name of wicked and covetous. What is the result of our own observation in these matters? Have the wicked changed? Are covetous men more softly and tenderly inclined towards the poor? Has the hand of the tyrant relaxed?

"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking-places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it" (vers. 4-11).

The expression, "pride of his countenance," literally refers to the heightening of the nostril. This was a Hebrew form of representing pride. Men were said to lift their heads high, to turn up their noses at the poor, and to set hard faces against the heavens. Wherever there is such self-confidence, truly religious feeling is impossible, hence we read "God is not in all his thoughts." The simple doctrine is, that either God or selfishness must be the ruler of the human spirit: where there is self-trust, there is no God; where there is true reverence, there is no self-trust.

But consider how strong are the temptations of the wicked man to trust his own sagacity and skill! See how many acres he

owns, how many people do obeisance to him, how many institutions knock at his door and supplicate his patronage, how men flee before him that he may have ample room on the highway, and then consider how difficult it must be for such a man to believe that he is merely mortal and that his breath is in his nostrils. There is no God in all his thoughts. Why should he trouble himself about God? He has but to look upon his gardens and they smile in flower; he has but to put out his hand even in the darkness and to take it back again filled with gold; he is not in trouble like other men, his eyes stand out with fatness. He is a trouble to all who are pious in heart, yet whose way is hedged up with hardness and difficulty. The idea of the fifth verse is that the ways of the wicked man are always successful. A corresponding expression is found in Job xx. 21: "Nothing escapes his covetousness, therefore his prosperity shall not last." Whatever judgments he may honour in an abstract way, he says they are practically "far above out of his sight," so that they have no relation to him and he need not concern himself about them. They do not from his point of view descend into his life and trouble him by their searching criticism: the wicked man is prepared to give assent to theological propositions, but he will not allow that the divine judgments are the rule of daily discipline and conduct.

Having got rid of God it is easy for the wicked man to get rid of his enemies. "As for his enemies, he puffeth at them," that is to say, he treats them with scorn, so to say, with the most scornful scorn; he does not condescend to use words or arguments, he simply snorts out his contempt against his impotent foes. The wicked man has abounding confidence in his own stability: "he hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity,"—more literally, "I shall never be moved at any time, I who am without ill." His mouth is filled with perjury. He sits in enclosed spaces and watches in darkness that he may murder the innocent. He is represented as secretly watching the poor. His eyes wait for the darkness. The eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight. To-day "the Arab robber lurks like a wolf amongst sand-heaps, and often springs out suddenly upon the solitary traveller, robs him in a

trice, and then plunges again into the wilderness of sand-hills and reedy downs where pursuit is fruitless."

This is the picture of the truly bad man. When will the poor cease to trust in him? It is folly to expect anything from the clemency of a tiger; it is madness to attempt to make rational terms with a wolf. What then is the poor man to do? In what direction are his eyes to turn for light and help? To this enquiry the remainder of the psalm gives a sublime reply:—

"Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked condemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none. The Lord is king for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land. Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear: to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress" (vers. 12-18).

Now God is called back again, as in the first verse he was felt to be absent and careless. He is appealed to as if he had been asleep, or had allowed the affairs of the world to glide far away from him and plunge themselves into unrighteousness and all moral confusion. But the very withdrawal of God is the occasion of this heart-felt desire for him. We never know how gladsome the summer is until we feel the biting cold of winter. It is in the deep midnight that we are most vividly reminded of the splendours of day. The Psalmist notes what cannot have escaped our own observation, namely, with what terrific rapidity the wicked man doubles his wickedness. Not only does the wicked man deny God in some kind of paltry philosophical way, from denial he proceeds to contempt, and from contempt to defiance. Man cannot stop at the point of agnosticism. It would appear to be impossible to be coldly irreligious any more than to be coldly pious. There is a point of passion even in irreligiousness; a point at which a man takes his affairs into his own hands, and having none other to trust to, he boasts of his strength and offers sacrifices to his own ingenuity. Let it never be supposed then that a man can rest at the point of merely not knowing; the next point is denying; the next point is defying;

the next point is absolute self-idolatry. But out of all the darkness which oppresses the soul of the Psalmist the sufferer comes with a song of hope and exultation. Through some rift of the angry cloud he has seen the king upon his throne, and has realised that though a king he is yet identified with the cause of the humble, he is the judge of the fatherless and the oppressed. Thus the greater triumphs over the smaller. Oppression, robbery, haughtiness, self-seeking had but a short day in which to display their folly and rioting, and within the narrow limits of that day they seemed to be triumphant and secure, but the time came when a greater law asserted its sovereignty and swept them away. The great lesson is that we are not to judge within misleading limits or to pronounce final judgments whilst processes are being developed. We are not to deny the force of wickedness or the malignity of unclean hearts, nor are we to deny the sorrows of the poor and the despair of the helpless, all these things are to be recognised in the broadest possible way; but to our immediate observation of these appalling realities we are to add the religious faith that at the right time and in the right way God himself will come and make the very boasting of the wicked the deepest depth of his humiliation, and the very grandeur of the robber shall be constituted into an element of his disaster and shame.

Psalm xi.

[NOTE.—This psalm must be regarded as referring to the position of David at the court of Saul when he was first put in peril by calumniators. It is generally agreed that the psalm shows a master-hand. Whilst the timid friends of David were filled with consternation, the Psalmist himself was full of confidence and rapture.]

1. In the Lord put I my trust : how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ?

2. For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.

3. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do ?

4. The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven : his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

5. The Lord trieth the righteous : but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

6. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest : this shall be the portion of 'their cup.

7. For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness : his countenance doth behold the upright.

DAVID'S GRAND CREED.

"In the Lord put I my trust : how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ?" (ver. 1.)

THIS is a psalm of David, and was evidently composed when he was in extremest distress. Whether he was in trouble under Saul or under the rebellion of Absalom does not immediately appear, but whether the one or the other his soul was probably never in deeper despair than at this moment. The utter helplessness in which his soul was plunged may be inferred, too, from the advice which his friends had kindly, yet foolishly, tendered to him. It would seem from the construction of the first verse that the friends of David had advised him to flee as a bird to the mountains, in other words, they had advised flight from trouble,—the coward's cure for the distresses of life. The quality of David's spirit is seen from the answer which he returned to this mean counsel. It was absolutely intolerable to him, creating

in him a sense of revulsion and utter disdain. There is only one flight possible to the truly good man, and that is a flight towards the Lord, his infinite deliverer. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." The suggestion made by the friends of David shows their own irreligiousness, and shows indeed all that the world has to offer to the soul when it is in its last extremity. A very remarkable thing is this, namely, the exhaustion of the world's proposals and remedies. The world offers one after another, with mechanical regularity, and soon comes to the end of its provision; immediately on reaching the point of exhaustion the world adopts the coward's creed, and preaches it with violent weakness to the distressed soul, saying, Flee ye as a bird to her mountain,—get out of the way; run as far as you can; seek the darkness, and conceal yourself in impenetrable obscurity. That is but another way of saying, Take refuge in death; put an end to all this trouble; make your own quietus with a bare bodkin, or otherwise; only have done with this trouble once for all. The soul in its best moods must be left to say whether there is any true reasoning in such proposals. Is the reasoning based on sound principles? has the reasoning in it any quality of nobleness or courage? does it not, then, cease to be reasoning at all, and fall into the degradation of proved and undisputed sophism and insanity? It is when the soul is in these great extremities that it must either invent a religion or rush upon destruction. Happily in the case of the Christian there is no need to invent any religious alleviation of trouble, for that alleviation is abundantly supplied by the promises of God, which are exceedingly great and precious, never so great as when greatly needed, and never so precious as when every other voice is silenced and all the world confesses itself to be unable to touch effectually the tremendous agony. It is beautiful to notice how an assault of this kind is repelled by the very character of David. "In the Lord put I my trust." That was the solidity of his character. The people who pitied him, and who undertook to advise him, did not know upon what his soul was built as to its faith and expectation; they imagined he was looking out for whatever might occur to the vigilant mind as the best means of dealing with a temporary trouble: they regarded him

as open to intellectual suggestions and all kinds of experiments, with a view to the baffling of his enemies and the soothing of his own pain. This was their profound mistake. Outwardly David was troubled enough; waves and billows were rushing upon him in great storms, so rapidly that he had not time to lift up his head and open his eyes upon the fair scene that was above; but inwardly there was a religious trust which made him what he was—a secret, unfailing, abounding confidence in the living God. all this confidence seemed to the outward observer to be eclipsed and indeed destroyed, but it was still there, making David's heart strong amidst all the temptation and wrath which turned his life into daily suffering.

“For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart” (ver. 2).

Here we discover not the policy of the unwise, but the policy of the really wicked. That policy is marked by cruel cunning. Wicked men hide themselves in darkness, that they may “shoot at the upright in heart.” These old pictures of the wicked man are portraiture which must not be taken down from the gallery of history. They are painted with a masterly hand. Fix the mind upon the figure which is here so vividly presented; the upright man is walking in the light, stumbling indeed, it may be, and not without fear as to the way which he is taking, yet his eyes are looking straight on, and in his heart there is a hope that he is advancing towards the desired destiny: but in a secret place the wicked man has hidden himself, and made ready his arrow upon the string; light is upon the good man, but the bad man has hidden himself and is practically in darkness; from the security of that darkness he delivers his arrow, hoping that he may strike the heart of the good man. That is a delineation of wickedness which is true in every line to-day. The wicked man, by the very necessity of his wickedness, is a coward. Men should make themselves familiar with the whole policy which wickedness has always adopted, that by being informed of its crooked ways they may be ashamed of it and abandon it for ever. Wickedness cannot modify itself, or improve itself, or make its moral quantity less; it may invent, or simulate, and perform many a trick that may surprise the unwary and the

innocent, but in the soul of it it is for ever bad, diabolical, and humanly incurable. In another psalm we learn that wicked men "shoot in secret at the perfect." They would seem to have no friend but night, and to be unable to move but for the cloud of great darkness. That they can do so much in the darkness betrays the presence of a vision which is at once unnatural and cruel. Let us, therefore, learn to hate wickedness as an abominable thing, to have no sympathy with it, to repel it at every point,—to hate it with infinite detestation.

"If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men" (vers. 3, 4).

Here is the expression of a mortal fear. The idea occurred to the mind of the Psalmist that the very foundations of law and order might be destroyed. This is the most disastrous temptation that can assail the human mind. Immediately following it are all the consequences of a panic. So long as evils seem to be open to the restraints of civilisation and the penalties of righteous law, society retains a considerable sense of security, notwithstanding occasional and even violent outrage. In this case, however, the idea has occurred that the very foundations of law, justice and equity might be ploughed up and utterly destroyed. Then the question arises, What will the righteous do? where will the righteous be? of what use will be their presence upon earth when they have nothing to appeal to either of the nature of reward or punishment? All life that is to be solid and lasting is really a question of "foundations." Our inquiry should be into basis principles, original necessities, the eternal fitness of things, the harmony that is based upon the very nature of God. Our laws and institutions are only valuable and are only assured in permanence in proportion as they represent the spirit of the universe, which is a spirit of order and light and steadfastness. Whatever errors there may be in the superstructure of society there should be no doubt about the solidity of the corner-stones upon which the building is set. On the other hand, it is of no consequence how grand and even solid may be the superstructure itself if the corner-stones are unequal to the weight, or are in any sense

faulty and unreliable. When the foundation gives way, the superstructure, however noble, cannot maintain its own integrity. The great necessity, therefore, of Christian civilisation is to have a solid basis, to lay down principles which do not admit of disputation, and to secure assent to laws which express the spirit of eternal righteousness. Hence the work of Christianity is profound, and being profound it is of necessity somewhat slow in its progress, making no demonstration, but quietly and almost secretly proceeding in its holy endeavours. In this respect it stands in strong contrast to the men who are fond of demonstration and of making such appeals to the eye as are likely to secure popular interest and applause. The programme of reformation is likely to be much more popular than the programme of regeneration. Unquestionably there is a disposition in the human mind to admire that which is lofty yet measurable, and which in some subtle way reflects a compliment upon its architect and builder. Many see the spire who have never seen the foundation. Many can admire the swelling dome who have no information whatever as to the nature of the soil upon which the stupendous edifice is placed. But if the foundation give way, who can keep the spire in its place? If the corner-stones shrink out of position, who can maintain the dome? It is the honour of Christianity that it alone is profoundly careful concerning the bases of society and the bases of the individual life; it insists upon the foundation being divine, not human. God has laid in Zion a corner-stone elect and precious. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid." "The foundation of God standeth sure."

David's grand creed is repeated once more in the fourth verse :—

"The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven : his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men."

The Psalmist instinctively turns to the holy temple and fixes his eye upon the enthroned Lord. We cannot but be struck by the noble elevation of the thought, as well as by the religious vigour of the language. The Lord himself claims all heaven as his throne, and because the Lord is in his holy temple the prophet demands that all the earth keep silence before him. This verse

is indeed distinctively divided into two parts. In the first part we have the utterance of rapture and religious confidence and delight: the Lord is far away, enthroned in a temple not made with hands, enshrined in the very centre of the infinite heavens: the picture is grand and overwhelming, but if it ended there it would be of little use, except as a stimulus to religious veneration. The second part of the verse, therefore, comes to our aid, and establishes a direct connection between the majesty of God in heaven and his relation to the children of men. Though high and lifted up and seated upon a throne, yet God's "eyes behold," and "his eyelids try," the men who are upon the earth. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous; and his ears are open to their cry." God must never be put so far away that our prayers cannot reach him, or his replies be lost in their infinite descent. Nor must God be so far lifted up, even in imagination, as to cease from the work of judging the creatures he has made. It should always be possible for us to say, "Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me,—search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

"The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup" (vers. 5, 6).

We have already seen that the conduct of the wicked man is marked by the meanest cruelty, now we see that the fate which awaits him is adapted to his quality and to his whole character. The wicked man has been using bow and arrow in secret, now the Lord himself shall be, as it were, in secret, and from his lofty concealment he shall not use bow and arrow upon the wicked, but "he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest." Mark the similarity of the action and yet the diversity of the instruments. If the wicked man can conceal himself, so can God. Whilst, however, the wicked can only shoot in one direction at a time, the Lord can make the whole heaven contribute to the vastness and intensity of the storm which he will pour down upon unholy spirits. This is no novel feature in the Scriptures:—"The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." In

the prophet Ezekiel we read that God will rain upon Gog, "and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! The wicked undoubtedly have their day, and they industriously employ themselves in turning its hours to their own purpose; yet it is only a brief day: "the triumphing of the wicked is short;" whilst they are yet pursuing their unholy course the whole heaven shall darken above their heads, the earth shall reel beneath their feet, and the great wind shall be as a great fire, scorching and burning and destroying them altogether. "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." However horrible the fate of the wicked, every soul that has not lost its religious consciousness or its sense of justice must own that such fate is well deserved. We are allowed to separate the wicked man from wickedness, and instead of desiring all these storms to fall upon the wicked man as such, we may pray that they may fall rather upon wickedness itself and utterly consume it. Whilst, however, we are thus at liberty to pray that the wickedness, rather than the wicked, may be destroyed, let no wicked man take encouragement from this view: it still stands as a literal truth that the wicked shall be driven into hell with all the nations that forget God.

"For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright" (ver. 7).

This verse most fitly concludes the psalm. The Psalmist is now himself in his best and happiest mood. He sees that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and that being so he will not forsake the righteous cause, but will bring it to fruition and victory. Not only does the Lord's countenance behold the upright, but the upright behold the countenance of the Lord. Recognition and fellowship thus become identical terms. Goodness knows goodness wherever it sees it. Fellowship is not a mechanical arrangement, but a natural expression of instinct, sympathy, and trust. What the Lord loves must eventually be supreme. Otherwise the Lord though omnipotent would be

defeated, and though all-wise would be outwitted, and though all-good would be put into a minority in his own universe. Herein is the confidence of the soul that longs to be good. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." "We then being in Christ are fellow-labourers, to the end that wickedness may be destroyed." We will not flee away like a bird of the mountains when the cloud shuts out the sun and the storm roars across the whole earth with destroying fury; we will say, All these things are but for a moment; behind them there is a solid beneficent purpose; they are but sent to try our faith and complete our patience. Being based on the one foundation, we will continue to build, however unfavourable the weather, however rough the wind, however unlikely the instruments with which we have to work, and however difficult it may be to obtain the right materials. The one solid comfort we have is that the foundation is right, and that if we persist in building upon it according to the best of our opportunities, even though the fire may destroy our work, we ourselves shall be saved. Nor will we envy the lot of the wicked. Now and again an arrow shot from his bow does indeed smite the good man and make the upright momentarily afraid; but the Lord is still in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven. We will wait on, prayerfully, patiently, hopefully. The Lord hath not hidden from us his purpose to rain snares fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest upon the wicked. We know of a surety that this rain will fall, and that when it falls there will be no escape from its all-devouring fire. My soul, come not thou into the secret of that destiny; be thy portion with the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness, and be the chiefest of thy delights to behold the countenance of the Lord.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, the appeal of the heart is always to thee in the dark day and the starless night. Men find out God when they are in extremity, when strength has failed, and wisdom has no further word to utter, and all life is darkened and distressed. We bless thee for living faith in thy presence, nearness, and willingness to save. This is our strength and our joy; it has become our song even in the night-time, so that now we have music at home, and we have joy in the presence of danger. All things are under thy control; yet hast thou permitted the will of man to arrest thy purposes or to delay their fulfilment: thou hast had patience even with evil; thou hast waited until the anger of little men subsided and the angry soul began to pray. Thou hast not crushed thy way forward with the violence of almightiness; thou hast waited and wondered and complained and entreated; thou hast stood at the door and knocked, asking to be admitted. This is thy way. It is the way of almightiness; it is because thou art almighty that thou art patient: with less of power thou wouldst have extended thine arm in resentment and penalty; because thou art the Infinite One thou art calm, thou art patient, yea, thou art hopeful even of the unthankful and the evil. Blessed be God for this revelation of himself in Christ Jesus. We know that thou didst love the world; thou didst wait for it as thou wouldst wait for one without whom thou wouldst lose companionship and joy. We bless thee for thy patience, thy love, thy Cross, O God the Son, in which thou didst display the ineffable tenderness of the divine heart as well as the infinite patience of the divine will. Now and evermore be with us—a great light and a tender benediction, an assurance of immediate and perfect help in all time of danger and difficulty, and a perpetual peace, calming the tumult of the soul, and bringing in a week-long Sabbath-day to reign over all our activities and distresses, our hopes and fears. Gather us near thine heart; bind us with the cords of thy love; give our souls a time of feasting day by day in thine own banqueting-house; and may the strength we derive be expended in self-sacrifice, in doing good, in heroic imitation of the dying, rising, glorious Son of God. Amen.

Psalm xii.

1. Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.
2. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.
3. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things:

4. Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail ; our lips are our own : who is lord over us ?

5. For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord ; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

6. The words of the Lord are pure words : as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

7. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

8. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

THE IDEAL CHRISTIANITY.

HELP, Lord" (ver. 1). That may be a good prayer or a bad one. There is nothing in the words themselves to indicate the quality of the petition. Everything depends upon the spiritual condition of the petitioner. A man may cry to God for help with a very selfish heart, without any due recognition of God's claim, God's nature, God's kingdom. The prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord. There is no meaner cry than "Help, Lord," unless it be inspired by a sense of personal unworthiness and a profound and loving consciousness of God's interest in good men and in good causes. A prayer may be forced out of an atheist. It is not a prayer ; it is only a variation of atheism. The reason given, however, explains in some degree the scope and purpose of the cry : "for the godly man ceaseth ; for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

We must not accept these words as true, simply because they happen to be written here, or anywhere. It is perfectly possible for us to take an unwise and incorrect view of social conditions. David did not keep a register of all the "godly" and all the "faithful." Another prophet said that he alone was left ; the Lord corrected his estimate, and said, No, not alone ; I have seven thousand who have never kissed the lips of Baal. It is unwise to take the opinion of dejectedness and forsakenness upon any topic. When we are in extreme positions, either of joy or of sadness, we are not qualified to pronounce broadly and correctly upon the whole scope of divine providence. In high joy, the glee that all but dances in the sanctuary for very ecstasy of heart, we may think all men good, all causes excellent, all the features of the times beautiful. In dejection, despondency,

orphanhood of heart, we may think we alone are left, and that the gift of prayer will perish with our breath. All things wear a sombre aspect; the whole year is one long November; the very music of childhood is but an aggravation of our suffering. That opinion must not be taken. Within the limits of the man's own personality it is quite true, but no great generalisation must be built upon it. David did not know how many godly men there were in the world, or how many faithful; but his experience is valuable up to this point, namely, that he felt that everything of the nature of trust, confidence, progress, depended upon the presence of godly and faithful elements in the world. The world was nothing to him but rottenness—an empty and mocking wind—but for the godly and the faithful. That the population of the globe had increased was nothing to David, if the godliness and faithfulness of the community had gone down. We must inquire into moral statistics, into spiritual arithmetic; we must make our inquest into the social fabric an inquest of character, a scrutiny of motive and purpose; then we shall come to large and just conclusions. Woe betide us when, in looking abroad upon society, we judge only by its palaces and temples and towers, its banks and reservoirs of wealth, and do not look into spirit, disposition, character, and all moral elements. The good men of society are its rich men; the faithful are its bankers, treasurers, trustees, and securities. This is acknowledged even by persons who are not formally connected with the Church. Even the drunkard would like to entrust his business affairs to a sober man. Many an atheist, were he called upon at last to say into whose charge he would give his little children—whether to a disbeliever or to a humble and tried Christian—might, with his dying breath, vote for Christ. So men are not to be taken in their ecstatic moments, or in their moments of dejection; they are to be taken at the middle point, the average line, the thoughtful moment; and then it is seen that godliness, faithfulness, are accounted the pillars of society.

“They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak” (ver. 2).

Here, again, we must ask whether David is speaking really, or speaking, as it were, sensitively—allowing his own soreness of

heart and conscious destitution to rule his judgment and obliterate features which he would otherwise be the first to discern and appreciate. But the declension is possible. Men may "speak vanity every one with his neighbour." Vanity is a shifting wind—empty words, compliments that come and go without carrying with them any moral impress or any spiritual value. Men may talk for talking's sake. They may mislead one another, the words carrying with them no force of the heart or reasoned consent of the understanding and the will. The saddest of all things is described in this text in the words, "with a double heart do they speak." A very apt expression in English; it cannot be soundly amended. The best comment upon this expression is to repeat it until we become reverently familiar with it. What, is it possible to have a double heart? Did not one man ask in sceptical wonder, and in a tone which involved denial, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" James put that possibility as an impossibility. He thought the very utterance of the inquiry was its own answer. He expected the question to be blown away with a contemptuous No. Yet this is the very thing we see every day, and feel to be true even in our own consciousness. Words are not straight lines; sentences are not clear as crystal; speeches are not as honey without wax, or porcelain without flaw. Charged with certain meanings, the speaker can easily betake himself to some hidden speech in his own sentence, some word that he had used in an unfamiliar sense; he can change the punctuation and set the thought in a new light; he can play many a knavish trick with language that ought to have only one clear meaning, the same value the world over, in dark days and bright hours. It is in this direction we must look for a great deal of Christian progress. What about our speech? Is every syllable like a dew-drop trembling on the eyes of the morning? Is every letter in every syllable an equivalent for the thought it was intended to assist in expression? Is the tongue the utterer of the soul, or is it bridled, partially gagged, somewhat distempered? Is it the servant of eloquence, or the bribed and hired slave of ambiguity and insincerity? It will avail us nothing that we speak religiously if we do not feel the religion that we speak. Christianity can have nothing to do with double-heartedness. The

one object Christ has in view is to clean the heart, purify the spirit, drive out every devil from the sanctuary of the life, and make that sanctuary the temple of the living God. There are many ways of lying. We need not wonder that invention has found many symbols by which to express varieties of falsehood. Men exclaim, "Black lie!" Sometimes they say, not without a meaning smile, "That is a white lie." Then, again, we hear of "great lie," "flat lie," "wicked lie"—as if a lie could be other than a lie! Falsehood must not be allowed one rag with which to cover itself. Any covering of falsehood is an aggravation of the iniquity. The word "lie" must go without adjective or qualifying word of any kind. To palliate a lie is to repeat the lie, or give licence to the false speaker, to stimulate him to invent new forms of deception, and to give prizes for ambiguity.

David, then, traces somewhat of the cause of this vain speaking when he says there are people

"who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" (ver. 4).

That is the beginning of the iniquity. When we mistake our proprietorship we cease to be religious, and we give up the possibility of being religious. What is the first lesson in true Christian religion? The first lesson is that we are not our own, have no right, title, or claim to ourselves; we are branded: we have the burnt-in mark upon us that we belong to Christ Jesus, that we are blood-bought, that we are not our own; we have not a moment or time, not a single energy, thought, wish, will, desire that is our own. That is the ideal Christianity, the very purpose and consummation of Christ's priesthood, the true meaning—that is, the large and complete meaning—of self-denial, saying No when anything within us claims to have an existence or a right of its own. But this cannot be taught in lectures, nor can men receive it through the medium of preaching; this is the last lesson as well as the first doctrine which is to be learned in the school of Christ. Other men have endeavoured to preach it without the inspiration of Christ and without the essentials of the Christian religion; they have become merely sectarian preachers or provincial reformers. We can only learn what it is to have no right in ourselves, not after we have been to

church, but after we have been nailed to the Cross of Christ in the very presence and companionship of Christ. Who can attain this wisdom? Who will not say before attaining it, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Who does not know that before obtaining this there are Gethsemane days, sweltering of blood, sense of loneliness, and, at the last, crashing temples and opening tombs, and a whole apocalypse of wonder and transformation? So long as we think that our lips are our own we shall speak what we please; when we begin to learn that our lips are not our own, nor our hands, nor feet, nor head, nor heart, we shall have but one question: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Tell me, and give me strength to do it." That will be the day of jubilee, the morning of coronation.

Now David betakes himself to a great principle; in the fifth verse he says:—

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

There may be no more selfish words than these; they may in reality mean just the contrary of what they seem to say. When David makes himself the "poor" man and the "needy" man, and then says God will arise for such, he may be degrading the very doctrine he seeks to magnify. Who does not think that when he goes out to war the Lord is sure to be upon his side in the battle? Who ever suspects that his poverty and need have been brought upon himself by himself, and that the Lord is no wise responsible for them? The doctrine is true, but the question arises, Who are the poor and who are the needy? That God will arise for them, there can be no doubt; but we must not unduly make ourselves into the poor and needy that we may take occasion of religious rejoicing that God will make favourites of us. Only let us be true and sincere in the inquiry. If we are poor and needy in the right sense, then all heaven is upon our side; if we have made ourselves poor and needy, or have suspected society of some injustice to us, simply that we may magnify our importance, we have mistaken the doctrine and misapply it. Who dare now preach that the Lord is on the side of the poor and the needy? We should need many

qualifying terms in order to come to a right understanding about poverty and need ; but there is a sense, profoundly and awfully solemn, in which the Lord is against the rich and for the poor. Do not hastily interpret that sentence, or put narrow and unworthy meanings upon it ; and let no man consider his poverty a religion or his necessity a proof of his orthodoxy. We must discriminate the terms, weigh them in the balances of the sanctuary, put them in their right places and relations, and then take all the comfort God offers us. Society is its own god in too many instances. Parliaments imagine they can construct society, whereas society cannot be constructed, using that term in its widest and most solemn sense, except by him whose glory is shown by the heavens and whose handiwork is displayed in the firmament. We cannot make ourselves individually, nor can we make ourselves socially. Society is God's idea, God's structure ; he putteth every one in his place ; the whole gradation is settled by Infinite Wisdom. What have we done ? We have meddled with God ; we have changed the relation and the colour of things ; we have coined words for our own use ; we have made investments of each other ; we have thought that he was the acutest and altogether worthiest man who could rise before his fellow, run before him, outwit him, tell him one thing and mean another, send him in the wrong direction, and then laugh at him when he returns at eventide disappointed and sore at heart. We can have no peace, and we can have no progress, until we ask Almighty God to reconstruct society, to pity us and forgive us for attempting to make society, when it was no more the business of ours to do it than to call up the sun or settle the bounds of the horizon. Whatever we can do in this matter is but co-operative ; we are fellow-workers with God. He must build the social house. When he builds it, what a wondrous difference shall we see on all the face of the globe !—no menial or undeserved poverty ; no arbitrary and penal restrictions, no necessary ignorance of the very first principles of life and the very first duties of existence ; no promotion on account of privileges and honours with which the individual man himself had nothing to do ; but a grand recognition of the value of man as man,—a Christian rule, a sublime theocracy ; only one throne, and on it the Son of man.

What wonder if David compares the words of the Lord with the words he has been condemning?

"The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (ver. 6).

We never know what the Bible is until we have been reading the newspaper. We cannot tell what Holy Scripture is until we have heard the lies of society. Never is the sanctuary so precious as when we leave the halls in which we supposed to see gaiety and joy, and the last phase of wisdom. Oh, 'tis rottenness! 'tis painted falsehood! 'tis vanity! We may dwell in the house of the Lord so long that it may become somewhat monotonous and wearisome to us, and the heart—always playing tricks with itself—may long to be elsewhere, to see the world, and watch its ways, and hear its music. Never is God's Book so dear to a man as when he has been listening to other voices that appeal to him. We have never heard its music as we have heard it after voices of tempters and liars have been uttering their falsehoods in our ears. The house of God will stand when all things fail. God's Book will be the last to go. We may neglect it, undervalue it, bring our own books into competition with it, and for a time the old Book may seem to be imperilled; but its day will come, and the great heart of man will say: After all, there is none like it; it touches every point; it is the same at night as at day; when it comes winter goes; when it speaks, the heart listens with all attentiveness; it is most when we need it most; what tragedy in its history! what sublimity in its poetry! what mastery of time in its prophecies! what tenderest pity, love, sympathy in its gospels! what eternity in its Cross! Oh, Word of the Lord, thy day is an eternal time!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, tender in mercy, thou hast kept back nothing from us that is good for us to know; the mysteries which thou hast hidden are better concealed than displayed. We have learned to trust thee. It is better as thou wilt, not as we will; we are impatient because we are weak, we are urgent because of our ignorance. A thousand years are in thy sight as yesterday, or as a watch in the night: to us how great is the period; how we are filled with wonder when we think of it, how we are overwhelmed when we attempt to seize the idea of time in all its vastness and sublimity! To thee there is nothing sublime but a broken heart, eyes filled with tears, and thy penitent ones crying for mercy at the foot of the Cross. This is thy sublimity. Thou lovest meekness, pureness, childlikeness, simplicity; thou lovest all the little flowers; thou takest up into thine heart all little helpless children. Rebuke our vanity, and turn our conceit to confusion, and show us that our strength is but a dying vapour, and that when we are weak we are truly strong, when we cling most to the Cross we are most beautiful in our Father's sight. When the road is all uphill thou wilt not drive us quickly, thou wilt allow us to go at our own pace, according to our failing strength, yea thou hast provided on the road resting places, beautiful nooks, chambers in the rock; if we sit there and look behold the landscape is a landscape all summer, and the ascending brightening heaven is a glimpse of eternal glory. Help us to believe thee, to trust thee, to lean upon thee, yea to commit ourselves unto thee, to throw ourselves broadly and wholly without reluctance or reserve upon the omnipotence and the grace of God. Pity us wherein we have sinned; we are conscious of our guilt; against thee, thee only have we sinned; still thy mercy endureth for ever; may we forget the past and avoid all its evil, and be new and true and upright and noble souls in the future. To this end grant unto us the baptism, daily and continual, the baptism of the Holy Ghost; not of dew, not of water, but of purifying, testing fire; and at the end may it be found that the basket of summer fruit which our life presents is fruit acceptable unto God, because grown upon branches that live in the one Vine. Amen.

Psalm xiii.

1. How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
2. How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?
3. Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;

4. Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

5. But I have trusted in thy mercy; 'my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.

6. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

THE JOY OF TRUST.

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me" (ver. 1).

THIS psalm begins with winter and ends with summer. It is most noteworthy, as we have already seen, how the Psalmist often sings himself out of his trouble. The hymn begins in a low muffled tone expressive of sorrow, almost hopeless, and gradually the tone heightens until the closing verse becomes a burst of rapture and thankfulness. Surely it is well even for loneliest sorrow to try at least to sing. It is surely not unnatural for sorrow to create a kind of music all its own. It is pathetic also to observe how all musical notes will lend themselves to the expression of grief as well as to the expression of joy and victory. Our souls translate themselves into the music which they employ. The Psalmist is afraid that he will be forgotten for ever. It is right to express our momentary experiences as if they were the permanent facts of our life. Nowhere are we forbidden to utter our sorrows, or even our despair. The spirit of the Bible would rather seem to say to us, Speak out all that is in your hearts; keep back nothing; if you are weary and heavy-laden, say so in the most expressive terms, and if all the colour has been taken out of your sky, tell God exactly how dark the firmament is, and spare nothing in your description of the darkness and storm which make your soul afraid. God will thus encourage frankness both on the one side and on the other; that is to say, a frankness of sorrow, and a frankness of joy. It is often thought to be right only to express our happier feelings; but the Bible would seem to say that all other feelings are also to be expressed, that in the very expression of them a sense of healing and restoration may, as it were, steal into the soul. The Psalmist here appears to complain of neglect or forgetfulness. This discloses an aspect of the divine government which is not often sufficiently studied. We are prone enough to speak of

God contending against us, opposing us, trying us by privations or by sufferings of actual pain; but in this case the Psalmist complains of neglect. Who can bear to be neglected where love is desired? Neglect is cold; neglect hurts by its very passiveness. It is even possible that the soul might prefer obstinate controversy to cold neglect. There is hope of opposition that it may be turned into sympathy, but who can expect to make anything of neglect or forgetfulness? It is like fighting with death; it is like endeavouring to charm the grave into sympathy. Terrible is the feeling of the soul as it begins to realise that it is no longer counted amongst the number of God's elect; it is simply left out in the cold and darkness of the star-forsaken night, without home, without friend, without hope. What child could bear to think that all the household had retired to rest, and had actually forgotten his existence and left him beyond the household walls? The very fact that such neglect was possible would be an element in the distress which would embitter and discourage the soul.

"How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" (ver. 2).

The literal rendering of this verse brings before us the folly of mere plan-making. David is taking counsel in his own soul; inventing plans of self-deliverance; making up schemes of daily life and programmes of service and progress. He no sooner makes one plan than it is displaced by another. His schemes follow in quick succession, but the second always amends the first, and both give way to the third, and he finds that in much scheming is much disappointment; it brings sorrow into his heart daily. By day he is mocked by harassing thoughts: by night he reverses all his day-plans in dreams, and in the morning he awakes to forget both day and night in some new vision of possible self-deliverance. Thus the mind left to itself is self-tormented; being limited in range, it is continually checking its own conclusions and hesitating as to its own purposes. How true it is—"without me ye can do nothing." This is what Jesus Christ said to his disciples, and we feel it to be true in our own souls when we endeavour to invent plans for ourselves, and to make our will into a kind of divinity. It is curious to observe,

too, how the Psalmist continually mixes up the right view and the wrong one, and how he is certain to fall into the wrong view the moment he turns away his complete attention from the living God. In this verse, for example, he occupies the wrong standpoint when he is wondering how long his enemy is to be exalted over him. When a man is truly living in God, he has no time to think about his enemy, nor any disposition to consider what that enemy will do. God occupies the whole soul with equal vividness at every point, and dominates in gracious sovereignty over every beating pulse and living thought. When a man looks at his enemy he may well be discouraged, because the enemy may be strong, rich, vigilant, stubborn, and altogether beyond his strength and resources : but when he looks at God, his enemy fades away into insignificance and invisibleness, and is therefore no longer an energetic factor in his calculations and outlook. It is no doubt painful that such a man as Doeg or Cush should be exalted over such a man as David ; but the very fact that David is the man that he is should enable him to despise every enemy, knowing that God is not on their side because of their unrighteousness and self-idolatry. It is very much in our own hands whether we shall be troubled by our enemies or not. We may make them great by thinking much about them ; or we may throw their power into distressing disproportion by omitting to bring into view the pledged co-operation and deliverance of God.

“Consider and hear me, O Lord my God ; lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death ” (ver. 3).

It has been considered by some of the most sober commentators that in this verse there is an indistinct reference to the possibility of suicide. David is afraid lest he should sleep the sleep of death. The temptation was very strong that he should put an end to all his troubles and sorrows by his own hand. Throughout the whole Testament there is a continual and all but inexplicable fear of death : “for in death there is no remembrance of thee : in the grave who shall give thee thanks ?” *Sheol*, or the grave, represented an infinite area, occupied by dead and forgotten men : it was the sphere of darkness and blind night : it was the region of silence : there was nothing about it of the nature of

light, or hope, or expectation. The Hebrew mind turned away from it with shuddering and horror not to be expressed. Yet in this very verse there seems to be what may be termed at least a negative hope of immortality. It is as if the Psalmist made a distinction between one kind of sleep and another, namely, the sleep that might awake again, and the sleep of death. Man seems always to have been groping after immortality. His fear of death must be distinguished from a fear of mere pain, and in so far as it is a fear of death it is at least a negative argument in support of the doctrine of immortality. Why shrink from death? If it is the accepted end of all things, why not rather covet it, as the weary man might desire the rest of sleep? What is there to be afraid of in death, if it be the extinction of every faculty and every sensibility? To all these great questionings about death and the future we must bring the answer of Christ: "Jesus Christ hath brought light and immortality to light through the gospel." By the power of Christ men are now enabled to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Account for these as we may, it is at least a pleasing completion of a wonderful process of intellectual development. This is a capital worthy of the historical pillar on which it is placed. The consummation is worthy of the process which has led up to it. We must contrast the expressions of Paul with those of David in order to see the superiority of Christianity over every preceding form of religion. Paul is not afraid of death: he has a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; when he has finished his course, he looks forward to the crown of righteousness; when he is assured that this tabernacle will be dissolved, he rather rejoices in the dissolution, because he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It is impossible to conceive the biblical process of evolution to be inverted. We should have shrunk from a book which began with a revelation of man's immortality and ended with the gloomy doctrine of annihilation; even where we could not put our argument into words, we should feel that such a process was an anti-climax, an irony of events neither to be credited nor tolerated. Account for it as we may, the biblical line is one of continual ascension and illumination; we go forward from Adam to Christ feeling that we are travelling on

a broad, sunny, and upward road; to have gone from Christ to Adam would have created in the mind a wholly contrary and insupportable feeling. To know what Christ has done for the human race we must compare the experiences of the most mature of the Old Testament saints with the experience of the immediate apostles and followers of the Cross. The very tone of triumph in the voice of the latter shows what wonders have been wrought by the indwelling Spirit of God. This holy hope must never be surrendered. It is the light of morning; it is the crown of noonday; it is the star of night.

"Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me" (vers. 4-6).

The Psalmist once more turns to his enemy, and therefore once more shows his littleness. But in this case the turning is only for a moment: for a new and happy inspiration seizes the spirit of David. Now dawns the summer. David thinks of mercy and salvation and the bountiful dealing of Providence. A remarkable succession of terms is employed, suggestive of argumentative completion and force: David "trusted," "rejoiced," and then "sang"—"I have trusted," "my heart shall rejoice," "I will sing." This is a process of education. It is wonderful how all these great processes square themselves with what may be called the natural logic of feeling. David does not begin with a song, but with holy trust. The moment the trust is established, joy begins to glow in the heart; as when a man has built himself a house, strong in the foundations and strong in the superstructure, he begins to feel the spirit of home making his heart glad and his life secure. Joy coming after trust, what can come after joy but song—the loud and happy expression of new and sacred gladness? The voice must take part in the holy satisfaction. The judgment trusts, the heart rejoices, the voice sings; thus the whole man is engaged in a noble religious service. The hymn that is not the expression of joy will die away in mere sound, and the joy that is not fortified by trust will flicker and expire. Here, then, we find a standard of judgment and criticism which each one may apply to his own religious experience. What is our trust? Is it in God's mercy? What is our joy?

Is it in God's salvation? Why do we sing: is it because of the bountifulness of God's providence? Here again we must not overlook the fact that every feeling indicated by the Psalmist is supported by a distinct reason. The mercy accounts for the trust, the salvation accounts for the joy, the bountifulness accounts for the song. All these three reasons are in full force to-day; and because the reasons continue in their operation the trust, the joy, and the song should neither be diminished nor restrained. It is in this sense that we need a professing church, a church of testimony, a great band of living witnesses, men who are not afraid to say that they have seen God's mercy, accepted God's salvation, and realised God's bounty. Profession should thus be the expression of gratitude. Christian profession should be built upon these three strong foundations, and then may express itself in noble dome, in lofty spire, and in every form which can attract the attention and satisfy the just expectations of mankind. O heart of man, take courage again! This thirteenth psalm may be a repetition of thy deepest experiences. At the opening the experiences may be full of sadness and grief and trouble, a sense of neglect not to be tolerated by the sensitive soul, and yet the process may develop, bringing with it light upon light, and pleasure upon pleasure, until at last there shall be a sabbath of peace, a jubilee of music, and expectation so high and glad as to bring the soul almost within the very precincts of heaven. My soul, wait thou upon God, and let thine expectation be continually from him; a light shall arise upon thee in darkness, and thy mourning shall be turned into joy. We must not be afraid of enthusiasm. If we were to hold our tongues under some circumstances of peculiar revelation and deliverance, the very stones would cry out; seeing that God must be praised and will be praised, those whom he has made in his own image and likeness should lead the song and be loudest in its utterance.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, do thou preserve us, continue thy goodness unto us, and give us the sweet sense of the nearness of thine hand and the sureness of its defence; then our soul shall grow in quietness, and the end of the experience shall be abundant fruitfulness: thou shalt be pleased when thou dost come to look upon thy vines. We bless thee for all thy care in the past; the recollection of it renders doubt in the future impossible. Thou hast written thy record in our lives—a record of tender love, pitiful compassion, ever-patient forbearance; and what thou hast been thou surely wilt be, if so be our desires go out after thee in loving wonder, seeking thee because none other can fill the void which they express. Thou art round about us; thou dost beset us behind and before, and lay thine hand upon us; yea, thou knowest our thoughts, our words, our whole nature: this is our delight, yet this is our terror: thou understandest wherein our integrity is good, sound, without breach or flaw, and thou also dost penetrate into the quality of our motive, its origin, its unexpressed intent; yea, thy word is sharper than a two-edged sword—it pierces, it divides, it spares not. The Lord help us in the day of trial, and be with us in the hour of judgment, and be gracious to us because of our weakness and because of the fewness of our days. We are of yesterday, and know nothing; we have had no time to know: the days have not only been few, but short, and our head has been troubled, and our heart has been distressed, and our eyes have not been able to look clearly. But all these things thou knowest, and thy judgment will be inspired by graciousness, and thy forbearance will be our trust in the day of criticism. We have done the things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things that we ought to have done; knowing this, we are without excuse; we will not plead with thee upon this side of our life, but cast ourselves lovingly, humbly, entirely upon thy care and pity and love: we look to thy tears, and not to thy righteousness, when we await the answer of heaven. We await that answer at the Cross. We cannot receive it elsewhere; it would be an answer of lightning and thunder and terrible judgment,—yea, the outpouring of many vials of wrath; but whilst we linger at the Cross and look upon the Crucified, and our hearts go out in ineffable desire towards the Priest of humanity, thine answer will be gracious, thy love will come down upon us, thy still small voice will announce thy pardon to our hearts. Amen.

Psalm xiv.

1. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good,

2. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

3. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

4. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.

5. There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous.

6. Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.

7. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

WITHERED HEARTS.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (ver. 1).

THE word "fool" has been traced to a term which signifies the act of *withering*. The sense would be represented by the expression—the withered heart hath said there is no God. Though in the Scriptures the term "heart" is often employed as signifying the mind or judgment, yet in this case, judging by the consequences which are detailed, the reference is evidently to the moral nature. A distinction is indeed made in the Old Testament between "mind" and "heart"; as in the instance of the first and greatest commandment. The point to be observed then is that the "heart" or moral nature has in this instance "withered"; affection is blighted, moral instinct is perverted, the natural and noblest aspirations of life are utterly extinct. A difference is to be marked between a purely intellectual scepticism and a corrupt moral aversion. There are speculative agnostics, whose outward life may be unquestionable as to honour and faithfulness; but there are also deniers of the existence of God whose object is to get rid of responsibility and judgment. Every man will know for himself whether he belongs to the one class or to the other. Christian observers should carefully note the existence of the two classes, and never lose influence by confounding them. To charge a speculative agnostic with immorality is to destroy every possible line of approach to his attention and confidence, and to regard a corrupt and godless man simply as an intellectual unbeliever is to aggravate his wickedness through the medium of his vanity. It is not transgressing the line of fact and observation to say that it is the "heart" which first and most truly believes in God. Where the "heart" or moral purpose is

simple and constant, intellectual aberrations will certainly be rectified or rendered spiritually harmless. Everything of a religious nature depends upon the purpose and faithfulness of the moral nature. The heart feels after God. The heart is first conscious of the divine absence. The heart soon becomes a medium of accusation through which the whole nature is assailed with just and destructive reproach.

The idea of "God" having been given up by the heart, certain practical consequences are inevitable.

"They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good" (ver. 1).

These are the consequences to which we have referred as shewing that it was the moral nature and not only the intellectual that had been perverted. A criminal life is the necessary counterpart of an absurd creed. Here again it must be noticed that the absurdity is distinctively moral. A creed may be intellectually absurd, and yet the moral purpose may overrule the mental peculiarity; but again and again it must be observed that where the heart has been withered the life falls into decay, putridity, and noisomeness. From this point the reasoning may be carried backwards, and in that case the reasoner would assert that because the men are corrupt and their works abominable, therefore the heart is withered. "By their fruits ye shall know them." We need not enquire what a man "says" when we have an opportunity of observing what he does. A man who says there is a God and yet whose ways are corrupt is to be regarded as a hypocrite: a man whose ways are honourable, unimpeachable, and benevolent, may really be under the influence of the Spirit of God when he occupies a heterodox intellectual standpoint. Not they who say, "Lord, Lord," are good, but they who do that which is right in the sight of Heaven. This rule of judgment will often save the cause of charity from cruel perversion. A narrow and sectarian orthodoxy will determine everything by what is said or written; but the true judgment will look to the life, study the spirit, and often find how true it is that a man may be better than his creed.

The psalm now enters upon a new phase by presenting a graphic image of the Lord, looking down as from a window in

heaven to observe the children of men. Note that the divine observer is not looking upon particular districts, or upon particular sections of the human family; it is a "look" upon the entire human race,—*"the children of men."* Thus even in the Old Testament we catch glimpses of the universal Fatherhood, and the purpose of God to include all men in a common redemption. The look was not only universal, it was religious. The Lord did not look down to see who were learned, rich, influential, prosperous: the one object of the divine observation was to see if *"there were any that did understand and seek God."* With reverence it might be said, this is all the Lord is really concerned about. Nor is this concern exclusive; it is in reality, and in the profoundest sense, inclusive. Evidently so, because it is an impossibility to have an intelligent and reverent interest in divine things without shewing vital solicitude about all affairs of consequence to beings made in the image and likeness of God. Beautiful is the expression—*"Seek God."* It opens up the way to many glorious possibilities; it was enough as a beginning that the face should be turned in the right direction, though the speed of movement was slow, and the intellectual vision was dim. It is possible to conceive of a true God looking with almost complacent pity upon men in the lowest state of idolatry. God knows the meaning of every wistful look towards even an idol made with hands, and it is not in his heart to hold in contempt the eyes that are opening upon great spiritual distances and new spiritual hopes. Where the idolater is content with his idolatry and never allows it to interfere with his depravity, God can look but with detestation and anger. Where any man is honestly and reverently seeking God, and sustaining his whole conduct by the spirit of that elevated quest, God is full of compassion and lovingkindness towards him, as a parent might pity and love an infant who has not yet awakened to self-realisation, or become possessed of the power of expressing his necessity and desire.

The judgment that is pronounced as the result of this observation is profoundly solemn:

"They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (ver. 3).

This judgment is wrought out in detail in the subsequent verses. The mind and heart having gone astray—having been turned astray like a deceitful bow—nothing became easier than to sink into ever-deepening abysses of iniquity: the case is put also negatively so as to fill up the measure of the great accusation: “there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Man cannot stop in a morally negative condition. Again and again this solemn lesson has been forced upon us by the whole current of history, and yet an insidious temptation assails the heart with the thought that it is still possible to forsake religious convictions and professions, and yet to preserve a pure and noble life. A distinction must be drawn here between those who have known God and departed from him, and those who have never known him experimentally and have been intellectually inquiring for him. The backslider and the truth-seeker must never be regarded as one and the same person. God having been surrendered as the supreme thought of the mind and the supreme rule of conduct, a scene of infinite confusion presented itself: workers of iniquity carried on their evil service as it in darkness; their mouths were opened in cruelty upon any who feared and worshipped God; the counsel of the poor was treated with contempt, and the poor themselves were devoured rapaciously. What is this but saying what we ourselves have known to be the case, that where reverence has been abandoned it has been impossible to sustain true and self-sacrificing philanthropy? Observe again that the case is one in which reverence has been formally given up, and so a great act of moral spoliation has been accomplished; it is not the case of one who is diligently studying the universe or perusing human history with a view of discovering the throne of power or the centre of energy. Such a man may have actually begun his religion at the point of assisting human necessity. Such assistance may be the initial form of “seeking God.”

The psalm ends with a pious aspiration:

‘Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad’ (ver. 7).

Sometimes amid the weltering confusions of life the good

man's only resource is in the utterance of pious desires. He feels that the time of argument has passed, and that even the most poignant reproaches are thrown away when there is no responsive feeling on the part of those to whom they are addressed, and it would almost seem as if punishment itself had lost its power to turn men to religious considerateness: under these circumstances the good man can but turn his face towards heaven and pray for the dawn of the better time. He sees plainly that men will never convert themselves: they have no power to climb out of the abysses into which they have plunged: even if they had the desire they are lacking in the ability, inasmuch as they have disabled themselves from coping successfully with the very laws which they have impiously defied: their hearts are withered, their will is paralysed, their very conscience is depraved; moral distinctions are blurred in most horrible confusion, and if so holy a thing as a prayer could for a moment escape their lips it would but add to the agony which it cannot alleviate. What then is to be done? The Lord himself must take the case into his own hands. He must arise out of Zion and work out the mystery of salvation. That he has had no encouragement, so to say, to do this, is the blackest fact in human life. His Spirit has been resisted, his mercies have been trampled under foot, his very existence has been disputed and even denied, and men have turned away from his throne to work all manner of evil with both hands. But the answer is still in God. Recovery must appear in the form of a miracle which it is impossible for reason to understand. Here the little faculty of explanation ceases in its toiling endeavour to make the midnight luminous as midday; there are times in history when even the preacher must be silent and the suppliant feel his inability to complete his pleading, and the whole Church stand still that the salvation of God without man's assistance may be seen and magnified. The "fool" of the first verse will never bring in the gladness of the last. It is never within his power nor within his desire to turn the captivity of the world or enlarge its freedom. We must turn away in hopeless disgust from the "fool" who has denied God, and look up with trembling and expectant reverence to the God whom he has denied.

Psalm xv.

1. Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

2. He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

3. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

4. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.

5. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

A CITIZEN OF ZION.

THE history of this psalm takes us back to the occasion of the ark being brought into the tabernacle at Zion.* This fixture of date has been endorsed as probable by the most eminent ancient and modern critics. This psalm strikingly resembles its immediate predecessor, and it is supposed that it may have been recited before the tabernacle when the ark was placed in it. The great cry of this psalm goes out from a solicitude that concerns itself with the question of permanence. Up to this point the history of the ark and of the people who associated their worship with it was marked by transitoriness, uncertainty, continual and anxious movement. There is a time when such action becomes weariness, and in that moment rest is above all things desired. Why should we strike our camp and be off once more? Why can we not find an abiding-place where fields may be grown and where the altar may be permanent, so that in occupation and worship we may no longer be disturbed by sudden calls to change our position? The word "abide" in the first verse is well rendered in the margin "sojourn," the idea being that settlement has been effected and that the traveller is

at last at home. The holy hill was the hill of Zion, an eminence that was sanctified by the establishment upon it of the sacred ark. Moses called Horeb "the mountain of God," and Zion is called "holy" because crowned with the symbol and pledge of the divine presence. So far, however, all this is necessarily but local criticism; the great question which we have to put concerns our own permanent citizenship in the land of God, the truly holy land, the land of consecration and service, unchanging and ever enlarging. The enquiry we have to put is, How is citizenship in it to be acquired and continued for ever?

This psalm has been supposed to contain a full-length portrait of the man whose position in Zion is assured and immovable. The delineation may be taken as a variety of the Ten Commandments, and as in some sort an anticipation of the Beatitudes. Compared, however, whether with the one or with the other, we cannot but be struck with the difference in mental dignity and eloquent expression, and with the conspicuous degree in which both the Commandments and Beatitudes stand above the graphic delineation. Account for it as we may, as a mere matter of literary beauty, the contrast amounts to an argument. The Ten Commandments were said to have been spoken by the Lord on Mount Zion. In proof of the claim that the contrast is an argument we have simply to read these Commandments as they stand and then peruse David's portraiture of a good man; carry out the same process with the Beatitudes; the issue will be that the Commandments and Beatitudes separate themselves in calm dignity, and worthily assume Divine authorship. Yet this portraiture done by a human hand has uses of its own. The very fact that it is drawn by a man's hand brings it nearer to us and emboldens us to criticise it with a completer frankness. David at least supposed such a man to be a possible character. What is he in reality and in detail? For an answer to that enquiry we must turn to the psalm itself.

"Walketh uprightly" [*lit.* perfect]. These words occur very early in Scripture. In Genesis xvii. 1 we read, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Here both the words are found. The reference is to a consistent and conscientious life. The word "perfect" has been rendered single-hearted; Wycliffe renders it

simply "not wilfully or consciously committing sin." The man who walks uprightly is to be distinguished from the man whose delight is earthward, the base creature who seeks in the ground mean satisfaction for mean desires. He is also to be distinguished from the person who is given to inventions, tricks, and all manner of questionable practices, throwing himself into various attitudes and postures that he may suit himself to the fickle minds of social temper and fashion, and so gain something for himself under all circumstances, bending himself to those circumstances rather than dignifying them by his own high nature. He is a man who despises the gain of oppressions, and shakes his hand from holding of bribes, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil: to him the Lord has promised a high dwelling, and pledged that his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks. The Lord has been abundantly gracious in his promise to the upright in heart. He that walketh uprightly walketh surely. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." If we are truly anxious to know what is meant by uprightness, we need not turn to etymology for a definition. The heart can answer the great enquiry. We have been so constituted that we know instantly that which is upright from that which is perverse and crooked; it is in vain therefore to pretend to be in search of etymological definitions when it lies within our power through the inspiration of God to lift up our character into moral dignity and walk before heaven in full possession and beneficent use of every moral faculty.

"Worketh righteousness." We have seen in the fourteenth psalm that some men are described as "workers of iniquity." The favoured citizen is a man who is industrious in goodness. Righteousness is not to him a mere department of moral philosophy upon which he has to speculate and theorise, nor is it satisfied with the delineations wrought out in language by heroic poets; it is a condition of spirit and heart before God admitting of culture within and sanctified expression without. The good man may be described as building a life-temple of righteousness: he is continually looking around for material which he can put into his building, and his satisfaction is in proportion to the largeness and beauty of the edifice. Those who are addicted to

iniquity are described as "workers"; they are not ashamed of their wicked profession, nor is their service marked by self-indulgent lethargy. The sojourner in the holy city is not only to do a better work, he is to do it with more serious determination and industry. He is not to be silent in the presence of unrighteousness, but is at all costs to speak out in favour of true justice and virtue. In his circle he is to be known as a man who will spare no effort to advance righteousness, whether found in the claims of an individual, the necessities of an institution, or the policy of a nation. Suspect any form of so-called righteousness that can be silent in the presence of oppression and that can let wickedness pass by without indignant repudiation.

Up to this point the character consists of three attributes, viz., uprightness, righteousness, and truthfulness. In a sense the three are one, yet so various are the circumstances under which virtue is tested, that each of these attributes acquires a speciality of its own. The apparent redundancy of expression is justified by the redundancy of temptation to which human integrity is exposed. The upright walk is observed, the work in righteousness is felt, and the truth which is uttered from the heart attracts and confirms the confidence of men. Surely this second verse is marked by the most penetrating spirituality. There is no escape from its terms on the ground that they are vague or that they admit of being applied in different senses and within different limits. "He that saith he abideth in God ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another,"—that is to say even social considerations ought to bind men to truth and its fearless utterance; trustees must not tamper with the property which they hold in charge; even if there were no divine fealty involved in this matter of truth-speaking, our social relations and bonds should make it imperative.

We now come into a series of details by which the substantial character can be tested at various points. It is right that there should be such testing, because the proverb has been established beyond dispute that "a man is no stronger than his weakest point." If a man's character may be represented by the number ten, it is perfectly possible that he may be strong in nine of the

points, but utterly fail in the last. Seeing therefore that our conduct is made up not only of a great spiritual intention, but of innumerable and many-coloured details, it is essential to complete cross-examination that each of the details be tested as a separate life and judged as involving, at least indirectly, the completeness of the whole character. A man may be no "backbiter," yet he may have reasons for associating with a "vile person." A man may have no wish to put out his money to usury, in the sense of wilfully profiting by the loss of others, or extorting from them returns which are illegitimate and fatally excessive, yet he may not be disinclined to take up a reproach against some of his neighbours. The great lesson is that we are not to pride ourselves upon individual virtues, and suppose that they will overbalance a great many insignificant drawbacks. Upon all such matters individual cross-examination is alone possible. When any man attempts to exhort the public upon these points he should be restrained by the recollection that he can only point to ideals which have been drawn by cleaner and abler hands, and not attempt to exemplify the ideals which he adores. We shall miss the great purpose of the psalm if we set ourselves to a merely critical estimate of some of its details. We may for example be anxious to know what is meant by "swear to one's hurt," and to have a detailed definition of what is meant by putting out money to usury. It is not too much to assume that when the mind allows itself to be drawn away by enquiries of this kind, it is too often obeying the suggestions of a heart that is only looking round for an excuse to justify some violation of the law. Under the ancient economy we have seen that if a man made an unguarded oath he was bound to keep it, if it injured himself alone; but it was graciously provided that if the oath involved any evil or loss to other men a trespass-offering was ordained. This is the very spirit of all great laws, namely, that a man must be severe to himself, never shrinking from the infliction of the most painful punishment, whilst he is zealously careful of the interests and feelings of other men. With reverence we may argue from the human oath upwards to the divine decree, and there we shall find that God binds himself by a vow which he cannot change. Jesus Christ realised this gracious law in his own priesthood: "Having loved his own

which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame"—observe, endured the cross, went through all its shame and agony, shrank back from nothing of its ignominy and bitter loss, but completed the sorrow that he might begin the joy.

The whole psalm may be taken as a promise to righteousness and an implied threatening to wickedness. If this is the portion of the good man it is not difficult to foresee the destiny of the man who is not good. The wicked man shall not enter the tabernacle or dwell in the holy hill. The very purity of the sacred habitation would burn him as with judicial fire. Cleverness, prosperity, fame hardly distinguishable from worship, will not stand the wicked man in good stead when he attempts to enter the holy place. Only he that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully, shall receive the blessing from the Lord. We need not marvel therefore that it is said, "Ye must be born again." "A man shall not be established by wickedness;" there is no firmness in its advantages, time will not spare its barren heaven of supposed prosperity and security; it endureth but for a night; in the light of the morning it shall not be found. Now that we know by many a delineation the right meaning of holy character let us not delay to perfect its attainment; let this indeed be the one object of our life, and if our prayers seem to have comprehended the whole circle of benefaction, let them come back and concentrate themselves in one mighty cry that God would create within us a clean heart and renew within us a right spirit. "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have heard voices of gladness in thy word, for which we bless thee. Thou hast caused us to see the sunlight of the coming time when Jesus Christ shall be seated upon the throne, and all men shall lift up their heart-songs unto him, who, through blood, answered the charge of sin, and by intercession made all human prayer prevail. We rejoice that there is such a future, for in the present there is pain and darkness and difficulty, which we have neither strength nor skill to overcome. To-day is a day of darkness. The present is a troubled and tumultuous sea, but there is thy to-morrow coming when the cloud shall be dispelled, and thy sun shall write the answer of light upon every mystery that has troubled the mind of man. Send upon us a renewal of thy pardoning love: lift from us the load that oppresses us, send one liberating ray through the dark gloom that gathers around our self-accusing souls. We come in Christ's name, we stop at Christ's Cross, we sit down under the shed blood; the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin—even our sin can be cleansed by that precious blood: God be merciful unto us sinners. **Amen.**

Psalm xvi.

A MICTHAM OF DAVID.

“**A** MICTHAM,” some say, a musical term. There is another and preferable interpretation—namely, “a golden legend.” Under this interpretation we may regard the psalm as a kind of jewel-case. All the best treasures of the great singer are to be found in this precious casket. Call the psalm a golden treasury; then it will come before us as containing the most precious things David ever thought about, the most precious hopes by which David was ever animated; a collection of apothegms; pithy, solid, grand sentences; words to be quoted in the field of battle, to be whispered in the chamber of affliction, to be breathed in the hour and article of death. Let us see how far the psalm justifies that interpretation of the word Michtam.

The Psalmist will be “preserved”; he will not only be created. There is a cold Deism which says: Having been created, that is enough; the rest belongs to myself; I must

attend to the details of life; creation may have been a divine act, but all education, culture, progress, preservation must fall under my own personal care. The Psalmist begins in another tone. He opens his psalm with the great word "preserve,"—equal to, Attend to all my cares and wants; pity my feebleness; take hold of my right hand and of my left hand, and be round about me, and never leave me for one moment to myself. That is true worship. Only a sense of the divine nearness of that kind can adequately sustain a noble and growing religion. We need a daily prayer; we die for want of daily food; every morning must be a revelation in light, every night must be a revelation in rest. "Pray without ceasing"; pray for the renewal of the tissue, the continual numbering of the hairs of the head, the suggestion of every syllable, the inspiration of every thought. This is not a selfish preservation, a preservation from evil, or danger, or suffering only, but the kind of preservation that is necessary to growth. Who has not seen the guards round the trees, especially the little trees, the young growths, so that they may have a chance of taking hold of the earth, and lifting themselves up to the sun, and bringing out of themselves all the secret of the divine purpose in their creation? A selfish preservation would be an impious desire, but the preservation being asked for as an opportunity of growth, is a preservation for which the noblest souls may daily pray. It is, then, not enough to have been created: even that divine act becomes deteriorated and spoiled, impoverished, utterly depleted of all ennobling purpose and inspiration, unless it be followed by continual husbandry or shepherdliness, nursing or culture—for the figure admits of every variety of change—the end being growth, strength, fruitfulness.

"For in thee do I put my trust." That was the claim which the Psalmist felt he had upon God. It is a great claim. The words may be so uttered as to become a commonplace; but there is nothing commonplace, in the sense of trivial, in such words as these. The meaning is: I have committed myself to thee; we stand or fall together; I have boldly told the nations that I have no other sanctuary, no other hope, and that if help do not come from heaven I am weak like other men. It is a noble challenge;

it is the only course by which we can really—that is, livingly and exhaustively—glorify God. We do not give to him our veneration only, our formal and distant respect, but we plunge ourselves into him; we cut off all other associations, and live, and move, and have our being in God. Where such a challenge can be addressed with the sincerity of the heart, all heaven seems to be too little to form an answer to an appeal so complete in its pathos.

The Psalmist gives an outline of the Universal Church whilst he is in this hot rapture. Not until imagination burns do men become poet-prophets. Nothing can be done in cold mind, dry intellect, icy blood. The Psalmist having uttered his prayer, looks round about, and sees “the saints,” and “the excellent” “that are in the earth.” With ineffable spiritual modesty he says, in words difficult of translation, “My goodness extendeth not to thee,” as though he would say: I have no status before thee, if it become a mere matter of argument and rightful possession; that is forfeited; but I have this in my heart which thou wilt appreciate, a desire for the communion and fellowship of everybody who loves thee. That in itself is a conception of true worship. We cannot extend the altar, but we can extend the church. The Cross does not subject itself to our manipulation, but the meaning of the Cross may be spoken in every tongue under heaven, and every soul may be invited to this great festival of love. This is the germ of the Universal Church. Up to this time we have been limited by a local term; we have had long pilgrimage with one called Israel: now we begin to see the day breaking over distant lands. The earth is greener than we thought it to be; there are harvest-fields beyond the river which we counted our limit: on the other side Jordan, and on the other side Euphrates—yea, even to the ends of the earth,—there is a possibility of growth and a possibility of harvest.

“But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight” (ver. 3). This is the communion of saints. This is the truly united church. Observe, the terms are themselves of a universal quality: “the saints,” “the excellent;” the reference is to character, not to opinion, not to varied ways of looking at things which cannot be positively settled; the Psalmist

dwells upon the eternal quantity—character, holiness, excellence, pureness;—these speak all languages, assume the hues of all climes, and under manifold outward diversity conceal an agreement subtle and undefinable as life itself. Who has discovered life?—who has taken it out with his dainty fingers and looked at it objectively? Yet it is everywhere—a spirit, a ghost, a mystery, giving its real value to everything, making a child valuable to the state, making the tiniest life a centre of sensitiveness—a possibility of agony. Did we look in this direction, we should lose all that is bitter in sectarianism, and cherish all that is good in the proper distribution of gift, and talent, and spiritual capacity. We should then belong to the Universal Church. Men are one, to a large extent, in worship. When they rise from their knees they begin to contend with one another: then “pray without ceasing.” This is the great gem which we have found in this golden treasury: a conception of humanity—new, gracious, inclusive.

“Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god” (ver. 4).

The word “hasten” comes from a root which signifies to buy a wife. The idea of the Psalmist, therefore, is—Their sorrows shall be multiplied that go out after idolatry,—which has again and again been associated with adultery in the whole of the Old Testament writings. “After another god.” Where do we find the word “god” in the plural number? Opening the divine book we read, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;” and reading further on, we find the mysterious plural as used by the Eternal himself, signifying holy and inaccessible mysteries of being. But where is the word vulgarised and used as a term of temptation? Verily, in the grammar of the serpent. Said he, “Ye shall be as gods.” A new term in what little human speech was then possible; an impiety in grammar; a distant and not at all obvious suggestion in the direction of polytheism. Who can tell how such ideas get into the mind? There is no insobriety in saying that they are insinuated into the mind by tempting spirits. Trifle with grammar, and you may come to trifle with theology; deplete language of its morality, and you may deplete worship of its inspiration. The Psalmist

here pledges himself to a definite prophecy. We are entitled to ask, Is it true? History can be the only field of evidence; by history, meaning the religious experience of the individual and the religious experience of the commonwealth. The more gods, the more sorrow; the more gods, the more familiarity, the less reverence, and the less worship. The Chinese, who have thousands of deities, flog the gods that do not answer them. This is literal, and this is necessary; to have innumerable gods is to have no god; to have a life all miracles is to be destitute of the supernatural; we must have unity, the sacred mystery of personality, the grand idea of centralisation, monarchy, eternal supremacy.

Why does the Psalmist speak in these high and noble tones? The reason is satisfactory. He bases his larger hope upon his own complete and abiding happiness. Thus the man himself becomes the argument:—

“The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore . . .” (vers. 5-9).

This is an appeal which is not only tenable, but graciously compulsory. “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup”—literally, of my condition in life; I have nothing else;—but, as some commentator has said, how rich must he be who possesses the Possessor of all! “Thou maintainest my lot,”—not only thou directest me in general providence, for in that sense God holds the wicked in his power, but thou dost keep my lot for me; it is evermore in thy right hand; I am not put in trust with it, because some mishap might occur in this life of tumult, and strange and bewildering surprise; thou dost dispose the lot, and then keep it in thine own hands. So that the soul lives in continual nearness to the Father, within whisper-distance of him, so that communication can pass and repass, and the outer world not know when his signal has flamed in the heavens for the guidance of the dependent and adoring soul.

“The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places” (ver. 6).

The land was marked out by lines, so that the inheritance began at this point and ended at that point; it was toward the rising of

the sun, or toward the setting of the sun ; or was near the river, or was far off among the hills ; but it was an inheritance that "fell out," that belonged to the individual whose name was divinely associated with it ; and the Psalmist says, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places." No matter where they are, for the whole land is pleasant. Is it not possible to think our inheritance the very best of all ? The same blessed and comforting thought is felt in the family. What mother does not think her own children the very best ?—admitting, as she may do, with a mother's reluctance, this drawback and that disadvantage ; still, taking a certain view of the case, how her children stand up with attractions, in her judgment, not to be surpassed ! So every man may deal with his inheritance. He may call it "a goodly heritage." Though some years there be little upon it, still the heritage is "goodly": the year before last the harvest was very abundant, and next year it may be more abundant still. The heritage is not to be blamed : the climate may be variable ; all the transitory influences of the year may be more or less disappointing, but the heritage, the land, is moist with a divine blessing, living with a divine promise. He who takes this view of life—its cup, its lot, its heritage—has the contented mind which is a continual feast.

Now arises the advantage of connecting the Psalms with the period of history at which they were written. Many of these Psalms have their historical counterpart in the Books of Samuel. Referring to the history as given in those books, you will find that these exclamations on the part of the Psalmist are not the utterances of a rhapsodist. These are not terms in poetry, or phases of an imaginative life : the man who wrote all these words was not living in some lordly castle, whence he could survey velvet lawns, and mysterious landscapes, and fruitful gardens, and hear the singing of birds that lingered around the castle roof as if charmed by some subtle hospitality within ; the man who wrote this psalm may be said to have written part of it upon the rock, to have finished the sentence in a cave, to have completed the eloquence when the air was rent by the cry of pursuing foes. In all such psalms the circumstances are the true commentaries. Enough for us to know at this moment that this

man was not uttering a Sabbath-hymn in a church specially built for him, and protected as to all intrusion and unholy violence and trespass; he was writing in an unroofed church, or writing in a hidden den or cave. If trust in the living God will stand the test of such circumstances, he must be a bold man who can throw away the advantage of thus vitally associating himself with the living God.

How the ideas grow on the expanding mind of the harper! Not only does he see an outline of the Universal Church, but along with that, and almost consequent upon it, he sees an outline of Immortality. This is an idea which has been growing in the Old Testament. Now and again some word has been interjected into the story that did not seem to belong to it, or was of another quality—a word with a colour, a flush, as if light from an unknown source had struck upon it and lighted it up into new beauty. Job has said one or two words for the explanation of which we must wait; the Psalmist now speaks of his flesh resting in hope, of his soul not being left in the unseen place, and of the Holy One not seeing corruption. A beautiful threefold division, too, is coming into human language:—"My flesh," "my heart," "my soul,"—what more can the apostle say in his noble rapture but "body, soul, and spirit"? No fourth quality has been added. David, in whom was sleeping, according to the flesh, the Son of God, began to see a strange outlining of new possibilities of being. He is more than flesh, he is more than soul—he is flesh, soul, and heart; and because he has this conception of the inner nature he says, Surely the flesh shall share this glory somehow; I cannot tell in what manner, but "my flesh also shall rest in hope." As if to say, I cannot tell all that is in me; I am struggling to say something that will not be said, but I am alive, stirred, inflamed: oh that some prophet gifted with the genius of words could interpret me into speech! To impair the doctrine of immortality is to strike at the goodness of God. In denying immortality we may be said to deny the Creator. We cannot treat immortality as a doctrine only; it is really part of the divine nature. Given God, and immortality in some form is a necessity. Has he created us simply to let us die? Has he given us all these gifts merely to mock us at the last, by allowing

us to drop into oblivion and nothingness? Does he permit us to climb to the very door of heaven, and to hear the songs that are sung inside, simply that he may thunder to us, You cannot have part or lot in this inheritance; your destiny is obliteration? Some argument must be founded upon instinct, impulse, yearning, longing, speechless unconsciousness. When we are all, body, soul, and spirit, lifting ourselves up to him, is it like him to deny the aspiration? or like him to give us that further movement which will connect us consciously with his own eternity? To this latter faith I incline. God has not created aspirations which he cannot satisfy. There is more in us than we can tell, and to these wordless impulses God sends this revelation of immortality.

The New Testament use of this psalm we will find in Acts ii. 25-28: "For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance." "Being a prophet," Peter adds, "being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption." We must bring Christ into the Psalms as well as history, to catch all their light, to hear all their music, and enjoy all their gladness. O blessed darling of Israel, David, thou wast the sweet singer of Israel; Christ was in thee. Who can explain the mystery of heredity and propagation? The very Son of God was in him at the time. He was, according to the flesh, the father of the Messiah at the time. And if we are related to the past, who can tell in what degree and in what mysterious manner we are related to the future? Who is singing in that songster, preaching in that preacher, writing in that author? The world may have to wait ages before it gets the full explanation of many a word of eloquence, and many a deed of charity.

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou givest songs in the night-time ; that is our surprise. Thou makest us to pray in the morning, and causest us to sing at night, and at midday thou dost make us lie down in the shadow, for the heat is too great for us. All the day long thy love is revealed unto us ; thou hast not left one hour without a sign of thy presence and care. We bless thee for this assurance ; it is triumph in the day of battle, it is healing in the night of sickness, it is immortality in the last struggle. We thank thee we are able to say that in our right hand is thy rod, and in our left hand thy staff, and though the valley of the shadow of death is still where it ever was, yet a great light from heaven shines upon it, and it becomes an upward way—a valley leading to the skies. Behold, thou hast made all things new. Out of the dust thou didst make man : is not the dust, then, living—ancient dust—itself the remains of incalculable life ? Thou didst turn the sheepskin into a covering for human nakedness : do not all things minister to man ? Thou hast turned the common bread into thy body, O Christ, and the wine into thy blood, O Lamb of God, and thou wilt perfect this process of transformation until the whole earth shall become beautiful, pure, a temple of God, full of holy song, the scene of holy service. We delight to watch these processes of transformation, to see them in ourselves, to behold the child passing away and the old man slowly coming on, to see how the letter is dispossessed by the spirit, so that we who lived once in a narrow limit now enjoy a glorious liberty ; to watch how all things that we once prized pass away like shadows that are unvalued, until a land that we had not dreamed of comes down to us in our visions of faith, and we are drawn to it as to an unseen and blessed country. Once we lived in the letter, and in things visible, and in things we could handle, and in things we called realities ; now, looking upon them all stored up in their empty wealth, we say, Vanity of vanities ; all is vanity : these are but symbols pointing us onward to the true things that abide for ever—the things of thought and holiness, love and consecration, and hope and heaven. Thus thou dost lead us on day by day. The child puts down his playthings as exhausted, the youth lays hold of things that appear to be of immediate value ; the man also puts these away, and begins to struggle after things invisible, immeasurable, ineffable. Truly, this is the birth of the Spirit, the new life, the larger existence, and only God can satisfy it, only Christ can answer its questions, only the Holy Spirit can work within it the miracle of contentment. We bless thee for all the tumult which has made us anxious for rest ; even for the vain and noisy controversy which has made us yearn for prayer. All things that help us towards the sanctuary are of thy

sending and thine appointing; they are mysteries from heaven: we accept them as such, and bless the living Lord for such ministries. Thou knowest what we need and that we are always needing. Thou hast made our life a necessity, and our very sighing an aspiration. We must pray. We say we cannot pray, and we pray whilst we say we cannot: our tears are prayers, our groans are petitions, our unrest is a wordless speech addressed to God. For the interpretation of these things we bless thee. We did not understand them at the first, but now we see the whole meaning and bless thee for it: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Continue thy work of education, purification, even until we know the meaning of sanctification—the spotless purity of God. Give us the mastery of life, the high supremacy, which looks down upon it from heavenly heights and scorns the things that threaten but cannot execute, that promise but cannot fulfil, that tempt but cannot realise. This life we can have in Christ Jesus thy Son—even this sovereignty over time and space. May we so live in him that we know not whether we have eaten or not, whether we have been fasting before God or feasting in some great banqueting-house of heaven: deliver us from the consciousness which dwarfs the soul, which imprisons and impoverishes the spirit, and give us to know that sweet absorption in thy love which takes no note of weeks or days or months or dying years, but is filled with the eternity of God. Overrule for us whatever happens in life. Save us from looking at things when they are too near at hand; show us that distance is necessary to true judgment—distance of time as well as distance of space. May we therefore be in no haste to sin with our tongue; may we have the grace of patience which waits to-day and to-morrow and the third day, and then looks upon the perfectness of God. Deliver us from all that would embitter our life. Wherein we have been disappointed, may our disappointment not become sourness in the soul. Oh, keep us sweet of mind—pure, childlike in heart; may we never lose the morning dewiness, but feel how good a thing it is to be near God, and accept life in its daily portions as a daily education. When we are ill thou wilt know how to handle us, so that we shall know not the pressure—yea, shall feel the comfort—of thine hand. When we are in darkness thou canst still speak to us: for is not the song sweetest when the singer cannot be seen? and are there not messages which may not be delivered in the light? When we are weary, disquieted, and ill at ease, give us a sense of thy nearness, and let our poor fingers touch the walls of thy sanctuary. Look upon men and women who have done wrong, and are shut up in prison for their wrong-doing. As for the criminal—is the criminal within the region of prayer? Thou knowest: we cannot tell, for our prayers die in sight of the awful wickedness. But surely the fool may be saved—the man who has been snared and entrapped, who is sound at heart and generally innocent; the Lord have pity upon such, the Lord send comfort and hope after penitence. Be with our dear ones far away, in other lands, yet still at home; some speaking other languages, and longing to speak their native tongue; some in trouble on the sea—that great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. The Lord hear us, draw us to the Cross, the scene of blood, the Aceldama made by God and not by men, the altar of propitiation, the mysterious mercy-seat. Amen.

Psalm xvii.

A PRAYER OF DAVID.

WE have heard David sing, now let us hear him pray. He played wonderfully upon his harp,—what is his skill as a suppliant? Does he know the ways of heaven? Can he speak the language of the skies, or any language of earth that can be understood there? This psalm is quite in a new style. It is said to be in the early style of the sweet singer of Israel. There is a charm in the early style of all great writers. It may be efflorescent, and redundant; yet there is wonderful passion in it, an audacity that inspires, if it does not affright; although the critic may see much to modify and rearrange, yet there is about the young heart, the young religious life, something that fascinates and stirs and blesses.

The prayer begins right boldly. Introduction there is none. The suppliant would appear to be in great haste, and to be minded to wait for his answer. The opening words of the psalm are a bold moral appeal:—"Hear the right, O Lord." Not, Hear my side, my way of putting the case; but, Hear the man who is representing a righteous cause; whatever is done, let right be done. This is the strength and glory of the Bible: it is a book of righteousness; its God is revealed as one who will do right. God is implored to measure everything by a straight line, by a perpendicular standard, to make no allowance on the one side or the other, but to be just to all men. In the second verse the same idea is continued. The "let" in the second clause of the verse may be omitted; then the words will stand thus: "Thine eyes behold the things that are equal"; in other words, God is a God impartial, just, and true; the sentence of heaven must not be modified by any narrow partiality: whatever goes down, righteousness must stand. Let this be felt to be the spirit of the whole Bible, and at once the book becomes a great and noble sanctuary into which all men may run, assured that the measure is right, and that the balances and the weights are just. This should be the prayer of the battlefield—every battlefield; the scene of every controversy. Let right be done! Who has not thought that his banner alone was stainless? Who has not been

guilty of the injustice of supposing that there could be no right on the other side? Where is there a controversy that has not on both sides of it elements of right? What, then, should be the true prayer of the soul that would have things adjusted upon a permanent basis?—that “right” should be done, that wherever there is right it should be recognised, wherever there is wrong it should be put down; and that the whole process of divine criticism should end in the establishment of the right alone.

The Psalmist is quite sure that he himself is sincere. The verses which follow seem to be a kind of anticipation of the Pharisee’s self-satisfied prayer; but they are nothing of the kind. The reference in all these matters is not to sinlessness but to sincerity. The Psalmist does not say: I am a pure man, without stain upon the heart or hand. He says: I am a sincere man; the general purpose I have had in view is a purpose marked by honesty. He does not represent himself as pure snow in the face of heaven, but as a man whose supreme motive has been a motive of honesty and general truthfulness. Sincerity can appeal to the right. We draw our prayer out of our own character. This suppliant is so sure of his own honesty that he says: Let the whole case be settled honestly. At other times, when he knows there is not a clean spot upon his whole constitution—one sound healthy spot—he falls right down before God and weeps out his soul in contrition; but being engaged in a great strife and knowing that he is substantially right as to motive and purpose, he chooses the court in which he will have the case tried, and the court he chooses is the high court of justice. Let right be done. The appeal is an awful one. It is like inviting the day of judgment prematurely. It is the invocation of a sword which once unsheathed returns no more until it has rectified all inequalities and all instances of injustice. We should be very sure of our motive before we invoke the doing of right. It is better for us to invoke the exercise of mercy. Most men will get more from pity than they ever can get from righteousness. Who dare stand before God and say, Let right be done? Better say, God be merciful to me a sinner; Father, pity me, spare me; I am wholly without excuse before thee, but thy grace abounds over my sin—God pity me!

David's pleas are not without strength and pertinence. He says he has been obedient so far as he could be: I have been working steadily at the plough; I have been faithful in speaking thy word; I have habitually sought the sanctuary; and my desire has been to serve God: therefore I appeal to the right. Then he pleads his desire to be guided. In the fifth verse he says, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." If we thought he had been boasting too loudly, he corrects our impression by thus casting himself upon the almightiness of God. He is young, adventurous, but not romantic; he will still acknowledge that there are paths in which men ought to go—literally, wheel-tracks; so the fifth verse might read: Hold up my goings in thy wheel-tracks; I do not want to make new paths, and to create new and perilous roads in the unmeasured wilderness of time and life, I want to follow the chariots of God. So prudence is compatible with youth; so it is possible to be young, bold, adventurous, and yet to cling to the conservative and the established and the well tested. Who cares to make new roads when good roads are already in existence? Who would carry his independence so far as to say that he will not travel by established roads from one city to another, but will make a road of his own? Who does not see the folly of a boldness or enterprise of that kind? The analogy has its applications to our religious life. There are old paths, old words, even old forms,—ancient, well-marked wheel-tracks: enough for most of us to follow where God has led.

Then he pleads his intimacy with God:—"I have called upon thee"—(ver. 6)—I know thee, thou knowest me altogether; do not let our friendship go for nothing; complete it in perfect consummation, so that I may see light in thy light, and know the fulness of thy purpose in my being. There are times when we can turn our spiritual intimacy with God into immediate and practical advantage. We have not to begin our communion in the time of controversy; it is not in trouble that we originate the building of the sanctuary; but in hours of contentment and blessedness and general prosperity we have been cultivating the divine acquaintance, advancing our confidence on high, so that when the trouble comes in great shocks and gusts and tempests, God is not afar off but nigh at hand, and our intimacy becomes

a real and valuable possession. Improve the quiet days, work hard when the wind is low; then when the days are full of noise, and the air is an angry tempest, there will be less to do in moving heaven, and in invoking and realising the right.

Observe the character of God as drawn by the Psalmist in this prayer. We have seen that he regards God as righteous. That must be the foundation of all true theology. There must be no difficulties of a conscientious kind in our communion with heaven. Once unsettle the moral confidence, and the whole creation of a theological kind totters and dies, and properly so. Reason may be baffled, Imagination may be confounded, but Conscience must have a sure standing-place, an everlasting confidence,—must be so persuaded of God's righteousness as to be able to say, The end will be right; at the last even hell will confess that its pit is not too deep or its fire too hot. Conscience keeps the whole nature right; conscience chastens imagination, and throws a rein upon the passion which would urge reason to undue and disastrous lengths. God has always been careful to keep conscience as it were upon his side, so that men might feel, whether by day or by night, all processes of providence would end in righteousness.

The Psalmist also looks upon God as probing the heart,—always seeking to know what is in it, watching its every throb and flush of colour. It is about the heart that God may be said to be anxious. Given a heart of honesty, a spirit that wishes supremely to be in the right, then how merciful—yea, how pitiful even to tears, and how patient beyond all known love is God, in relation to every other department of life! As we, on our side, are solicitous that there should be no dispute on moral grounds, in relation to the divine purpose and government, so God may be said to be anxious, on his side, that our heart should be right. That being so, he can understand the ambition of reason and the audacity of imagination.

But is the Psalmist's portraiture of the divine character all drawn in stern lines? Are there no tears in all the delineation? The seventh verse is our reply:—"Shew thy lovingkindness"—that would be beautiful if it stood alone, but the word lovingkindness does not stand alone—"Shew thy marvellous

lovingkindness." Has any New Testament writer suggested a tenderer aspect of the divine character? Observe how the words accumulate: kindness, lovingkindness, marvellous lovingkindness. Religion must not be a matter of abstract right, some lofty or metaphysical geometry of perpendicular lines and horizontal positions; it must go further and be more: and how much further can it go, and how much more can it be, than as represented by such words as kindness, lovingkindness, mercy, tender mercy, marvellous lovingkindness? Now the balance seems to be adjusted: the stern in law is balanced by the tender in pity.

This suppliant is a poet. He thinks in images. When did he ever write without symbolism, metaphor, the fine colour which is thrown upon common words by the poet-prophet? In this matter the Psalmist is just to himself, even in this pious composition, this sacred address to the ear of God. In the eighth verse he says, "Keep me as the apple of the eye." Religion cannot do without metaphors. Religion itself, as we understand it, is but a metaphor, pointing to its larger self, beyond the horizon, above the zenith. "The apple of the eye"—literally, the manikin of the eye, the little man in the eye; that central eye, that without which there would be no eye. Keep me as the gem, or living point, of the eye.

"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings" (ver. 8).

What wings? Quote the Old Testament instances in which this figure is used, and you will find that they are instances relating to the eagle, the vulture,—flying things with great pinions that might almost darken the sun. Under such outspread pinions would the Psalmist be hidden. These are Hebrew figures, but we are not Hebrews. Is any use made of these figures, nearer our own custom, nearer our own simplicity? The answer is in the affirmative. Where the Hebrew says the "manikin" of the eye, the Gentile language says the "daughter" of the eye—"the little daughter"; a gentler term, a coming-down to our historical standing-place, without loss of dignity, but with some accession of tenderness. "Wings"—wings of the eagle—wings of the vulture, says the Hebrew; but when the Saviour speaks, he says, "as a hen." There is no loss of dignity; there is a revelation of household nearness and pity. The ancient figure

is—"as an eagle stirreth up her nest"; in the New Testament the Saviour says, "I would have gathered thee as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings,"—poor wings, as compared with the eagle's and the vulture's, but a mother's wings nevertheless; and but a figure after all, representing in some bold way, or in some modest form, the available almightiness of the Almighty God.

Another figure occurs in the thirteenth verse:—"Arise, O Lord, disappoint him." The English word "disappoint" does not represent the original meaning in the most graphic form. The figure is that of a champion going out to meet the enemy, and to break him in pieces. Read: Arise, O Lord, go forth, meet him ere he start from home; be first on the field; be ready to encounter him the moment he comes out from his hiding-place, and smite him with thy righteousness. Thus the Lord fights the battle alone oftentimes. We are not called into the controversy at all; the whole shock takes place without our knowledge, yet not without being an answer to our prayer. In the New Testament we have sketches of worldly men, but say whether there is any sketch amongst them equal to the portraiture given in the fourteenth verse of this Psalm. This is a perfect delineation of the worldly man. It is impossible to add one useful line to it:—"Men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes"; their life is a limited life; it is all visible, measurable, namable; the whole life can be written out in plain terms and figures, and the whole value can be totaled in summary numbers. It is a pitiful man who is sketched in the fourteenth verse—a worldling, a grubber, a man who lives in the dust,—almost a beast. Whatever may have been outworn by the process of the ages, this picture of the worldly man is to-day correct in every line, vivid and true in every tint.

We now come to the fifteenth verse, so generally misunderstood and misapplied:—"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Who has not misread this verse by not perceiving its punctuation? How often has the comma after "awake" been struck out, and thus the whole sense of the passage lost! It has been read, "when I awake with thy likeness"; being so read

it has been violated. Observe the punctuation, and further comment is needless. We might turn it round thus : I shall be satisfied with thy likeness when I awake. The man does not awake with the likeness ; he is satisfied with the likeness when he awakes. But why is he about to awake ? This is a note of time. The explanation of this is in the third verse :—"Thou hast visited me in the night." This prayer was a prayer offered in darkness. Who can tell how many of the Psalms were night thoughts ? How could a soldier find time to write psalms or prayers in the day season, when every sound was an alarm, every shadow was a challenge ? How could minstrels sing then, or suppliants stop to write their prayers ? Beautiful is the figure of the Psalmist writing his psalms at night : the hurly-burly done for the day, and the scribe sets himself to make record of his heart's deepest experiences. Who cannot compose best at night-time ? The day seems to be made for active thought—outward, urgent service, and the calm night for setting down in order the recollections of the day's controversy. Now we come to the fifteenth verse :—"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness" ; I am about to sleep, to lie down and take what rest I may ; I shall be satisfied with thy likeness when I awake : the morning shall see me a stronger man, the morning shall bring a larger and truer theology, the morning will be a time of liberty and enlargement. Yet men do not know always what they are saying as to the fulness of its meaning, its uttermost possibility and final consummation. He is no fanatic who sees in such words strugglings after immortality, the beginnings of a new mysterious energy in the soul that will by-and-by be articulated into resurrection. To sleep, now that we understand it, is to die ; to awake, now that we see the larger meanings of things, is resurrection. We did not see these things at the first, but now they are clear. We thought of sleep in a merely animal sense : it was a bodily recreation, something to be done at the end of a period of service. Now that we have more light we see clearly that sleep is death, waking resurrection, and when we awake we shall see the likeness of God, and we shall be satisfied with that likeness ; that is to say, he shall come into us, fill us : we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. A transforming sight : whilst we gaze upon the beautiful, we ourselves shall be beautified.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, let it please thee to show us more and more of the beauty and tenderness of thy Son. It is thine to show Christ to the heart—we cannot see him with our dull eyes, but if thou dost anoint our eyes with eye-salve that we may see, we shall behold him near at hand, the great light and the only life. We have heard of him by the hearing of the ear—now would we receive him into the sanctuary of our love, and have long converse with him, and tender, as those who exchange deepest confidences, and express to one another the most urgent necessities and longings of the heart. We would hear him speak to us in his whisper as well as in his great thunder: we would hear from him the voice still and small that will not add to our grief, but utterly take it away, by the tenderness of the sympathy, by the richness of the grace with which it will speak to our wounded spirits. Thou hast yet more to say unto us—thou art never done—always is there one more word—one other message, one further revelation. Thus dost thou take us along the road of our life promising and fulfilling, and yet making every fulfilment itself a still richer promise. Thou hast kept the good wine until now; we behold the beauty of the Lord as we never saw it before—it is richer, tenderer, nearer, more complete in its persuasiveness, more powerful in its attraction. May we thus see it every day, until we exchange all meaner lights and all poorer mediums for the great glory and the unveiled majesty in heaven. Amen.

Psalm xviii.

[NOTE.—Critics are very definite in their judgment that this psalm is the most magnificent ode which David composed. It was sung in the last years of prosperity, when the surrounding nations all knelt before the king in homage and presented to him tribute. The form of the psalm is distinctly after the manner of David, who loved to dwell upon the phenomena of the natural world and to find his way through nature up to nature's God. Probably the psalm was composed in view of the occurrence of some great festival. It begins with unusual solemnity. Overwhelmed by a sea of trouble, and sinking to the very gates of hell, the king cries to Jehovah for help; his prayer is heard, and the answer comes accompanied with all the artillery of heaven. A competent critic has said: "Its wealth of metaphor, its power of vivid word-painting, its accurate observation of nature, its grandeur and force of imagination, all meet us here; but above all the fact that the bard of Israel wrote under the mighty conviction of the power and presence of Jehovah. The phenomena of the natural world

appealed to his imagination as to that of poets generally, but with this addition, that they were all manifestations of a supreme glory and goodness behind them." The psalm closes with the same high and solemn note with which it began.]

GLORIFIED PROVIDENCE.

THE title states that the words of this song were spoken by David unto the Lord in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. This, therefore, fixes the circumstances and consequently the historical atmosphere in which the whole production must be studied. It is important to know that there is an actual historical background, and that the poet is not inventing phrases merely for the sake of relieving a passing religious emotion. In order to understand the poetry we must understand the history, and in order to do the history full justice we must carry it up to its poetical enlargements and interpretations. Every fact has a corresponding parable, and every parable points to an underlying fact. Forgetfulness of this simple rule has led to great bewilderment, and in some cases to not a little moral confusion. It has been said that parable is the larger truth. This is emphatically so in the interpretation of all matters connected with the kingdom of God. It was left for Jesus Christ, in a very large degree, to deal with this infinite region of parable. Other teachers told what they had seen, and were content to be regarded as mere eye-witnesses; up to that point their testimony was of course invaluable; but a teacher was needed who would go beyond the strictly factual basis and give the world those larger interpretations which are possible only to parabolical embodiment. In the light of these considerations, we must regard the Psalm as poetical history, or historical poetry. It should be read concurrently with 2 Samuel xxii. Reading the one in immediate sequence to the other will form an admirable illustration of what we have said concerning the translation of history into poetry. The whole psalm may be taken as a glorifying of divine government. The divine government is there of course as a simple and positive fact, but it required an imagination quickened by David's agonistic experience to express in adequate terms the grandeur of the thoughts surrounding the idea of God's throne

and rule. We believe, however, that the full explanation of a psalm can only be realized in proportion as we consider it in its relations to Jesus Christ. What was impossible to David was possible to the Messiah whom he prophetically represented. We have no hesitation, therefore, in fixing this as one of the Messianic psalms, and finding in the triumph and sovereignty of Jesus Christ the fact which is but poorly approached even by this redundancy of poetical metaphor and eloquence. This psalm is a kind of apocalypse in anticipation. The man who wrote the Book of Revelation might have begun his literary career by writing the eighteenth psalm. There is the same grand command of language, the same daring imagery, the same noble contempt for all the material forces which appear to be so formidable to the merely material investigator. What is standard and fixed and immovable to the man whose mind operates within the limits of matter, becomes quite easy of treatment, and is indeed blown about as by a great wind, under the conception of a man whose imagination is ennobled by religious faith and sanctified by religious humility. In this psalm, for example, the earth shakes and trembles; the foundations also of the hills are moved and shaken, because of the wrath of heaven; out of God's nostrils there goes up a smoke, and fire out of his mouth devours, and flaming coals blaze from his lips. In his condescension God bows the heavens also, and comes down, and a black cloud—infinite masses of rain—is gathered and bent towards the earth under the majestic movement. God makes darkness his secret place, and his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies: the Lord thunders in the heavens, and the Highest gives forth his voice, and the sound of that voice is as the commingling of hailstones and coals of fire. All this sublime imagery is obviously apocalyptic, and is to be interpreted by the imagination rather than inquired into by the critical faculty.

Turning to the psalm for the purpose of distinct religious edification, let us note the particular providence which was glorified. This is stated in verses 4-6:—

*The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men

made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about : the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God : he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears."

No attempt is here made to diminish the severity of the crisis. Often when a great agony is overpast the sufferer himself forgets its intensity, and is inclined to suppose that it might have been cured by less ostentatious means than had been adopted for its pacification. We are seldom critically correct in the recollection of our sorrows. We either unduly magnify them, or we so far modify their intensity as to make any remedial measures look as simple and superficial as possible. David vividly remembered all his afflictive experience. He does not hesitate to speak of that experience in words which are metaphorical, if not romantic, without at all affecting the reality of the trouble through which he had passed. He says "the sorrows of death compassed" him. Some have interpreted this expression as birth-pangs ; others again have used the word cords. It has been thought that the figure of the hunter in the next verse, in which we read of the snares of death, fixes the meaning there to be cords. In Samuel, David represents himself as submerged or overwhelmed by the progress or waves of the trouble which had been made to pass over him. Sometimes indeed we do not know what real trouble we have been in until we have been removed from it for some distance and thus enabled to contemplate it in its totality. Again and again the mind exclaims concerning the impossibility that such and such trouble can really have been survived. We are familiar with the experience which declares that certain afflictions could not possibly be borne a second time. It is well to bear in memory our greatest sorrows that we may also recollect our greatest deliverances. There is no true piety in undervaluing the darkness and the horror through which the soul has passed. Instead of making light of the most tragical experiences of life, we should rather accumulate them, that we may see how wondrous has been the interposition of the divine hand and how adequate are the resources of Heaven to all the necessities of this mortal condition. Even admitting the words to be metaphorical, they present a vivid picture of what human sorrow may be,—whatever may

be rationally imagined may be actually undergone; as to David's own consciousness, what is here stated was a matter of the sternest reality. It should be borne in mind, too, that trouble is a different thing to different men, even when it comes in the same guise and quantity. Much must depend upon temperament. Things animate suffer; things inanimate do not respond to the blow with which they are struck. The poetic temperament is the most suffering of all. According to the sensitiveness of the nature is the terribleness of the stroke which falls upon it. David had the gift of expression even in this matter of trouble; he remembered every pang; he saw every spectral image; he could give a name to every passing emotion; he grew eloquent in the redundancy of his language in setting forth the blackness and terribleness of the night through which his soul had been supernaturally conducted. Other men have no gift of telling the extent of affliction which they have undergone. They know they have been in trouble, but they have no words wherewith to set forth before the minds of others adequate images of their actual distress. We must form our estimate of human experience either from the one class or the other,—that is, from those who have the gift of expression, or from those who suffer in silence: taking the language of such a man as David for our guide, we cannot but see here the all but infinite capability of human nature in the matter of positive and intolerable anguish. It is curious to notice, too, how sorrow in its utmost pain and fear tends downward when it seeks for some adequate image. As surely as our high and triumphant joy goes up to heaven for its metaphors and symbols, so truly does our extremest anguish find only in hell that which is adequate to give even an outline of its burning pain. When in the fourth verse the Psalmist speaks of "the sorrows of death," and in the fifth verse points to "the sorrows of hell," we see a natural operation of the human mind. Left to itself, the human mind turns its own experience into a revelation alike of heaven and of hell. As mere terms these may have been brought to us by others, but being brought they instantly fit an experience which is full of joy or sorrow. Even were the words blotted from the inspired page, we should still be conscious of the realities within us which these words more fitly typify than any others.

This being the bitter and awful experience of David, we may now turn to the providence by which he was delivered, as recorded in the seventh and following verses. Now let us, in the first instance, try to find the literal line, the plain matter-of-fact occurrence, which runs through the whole of this poetical representation. David means to say that the enemy was thrown into consternation by natural phenomena. He describes these phenomena as shakings of the earth and movings of its foundations, and the strange darts of light which seemed to shoot through and through the pavilion of darkness. Stripped of the poetry, the fact remains that there are times when all nature seems to be employed on the side of vindicating righteousness or punishing iniquity. Account for it as we may, there is the fact that in our own experience there are hours when nature seems to be unwilling to accept our co-operation, when in very deed it would seem almost personally to contradict and exasperate us, setting our ingenuity at defiance and repelling the hand that would cultivate and control.

In the next place, the Psalmist sets it down as a familiar thought that the supernatural may overrule the ordinary,—that is to say, that spiritual impressions may absorb every other feeling. Everywhere the Psalmist saw the living God. The whole universe seemed to be alive with his presence and to be afraid of his glance. The hills could not stand still as he approached them, and the shadow of the cherub upon which he did fly seemed to bring the darkness of night with it. The earth was no longer a place of mere dust in the estimation of the Psalmist; it was a church filled by the living presence of the eternal God; on every side was the burning altar, and the whole air was charged with holy incense. This of course is a poetical representation, but underneath it is a plain and obvious reality, confirmed by the spiritual experience of every Christian. There are seasons when we can almost see God in the operations of nature—in the beauty of the flower, in the splendour of the stars, in all the comeliness of summer, in all the bountifulness of hospitable harvest. At other times God may seem afar off, but in these better seasons he is nigh at hand: the material seems to have been reduced to a minimum, and all nature takes up the

parable of the kingdom of heaven, and relates it in every hue of language and every tone of music. Then the delighted dreamer exclaims, Lo, God is here, and I knew it not! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

We next see how vividly the Psalmist realised the absolute power of mind over matter :—

“Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils” (ver. 15).

These words represent the idea that when mind is fully roused, and is in its noblest action, all matter trembles in its presence as a thing servile and helpless. Matter appears to be strong and noble under some circumstances, but under other conditions it trembles and fades and dies out of sight as that which is contemptible and unworthy to be seen when the Lord's power is fully abroad. What is this but saying in plain language that there are times when the universe appears to be a thing of mind rather than a thing of matter—when the whole plan of creation seems to be an infinite thought rather than a complicated mechanism? Once let the mind seize the idea that the spiritual is greater than the material, and then only poetry can express the prose fact that the throne of the universe is filled by a Spirit, infinite, glorious, and loving, and that all so-called iron law is in the power of that Spirit, to be moulded and appointed according to its beneficent designs.

Passing from this point, the Psalmist shows how the impossible was made possible by the omnipotence of God.

“For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall” (ver. 29).

“He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms” (vers. 33, 34).

This also is a poetical way of representing the fact that impossibilities have often been made possible in our own experience. Looking back upon certain combinations of circumstances, we cannot but feel that we were surrounded by great and high walls, and that troops of dangers thickened around us in deadly array. Now that we see ourselves in a “large place,” we are tempted to

believe that we are still in a dream, and that our liberty is a thing which we hold only in the uncertain daylight of a momentary vision. We say it is not possible that we can have escaped all our foes and entirely left behind us the "great and terrible wilderness." We still feel as if the enemy might seize us, and as if a moment's boasting would mean lifelong subjugation to the tyranny which we have supposedly escaped. In this view of our own circumstances, our song is not permitted to reach its full compass of delight, lest the enemy should overhear our triumphing and again seize us as his prey. We are pursued by our enemies; when our imagination is vexed by the cross-colours which make up the panorama of life, it is easy to persuade us that to-morrow we shall be back again in chains, for we have enjoyed but an imaginary liberty. Then, under happier circumstances, we see how the miracle is a simple reality—that we have in very deed escaped perils which at one time seemed to be insurmountable, and that our escape is due entirely to the exercise of the almightiness of God. It is remarkable how under such circumstances we unconsciously magnify our own importance in the universe. We do not mean to be ostentatious and proud when we declare that God has exerted himself specially on our behalf, and has indeed himself been disquieted until our comfort was restored and established. The Psalmist speaks here as if he were the sole object of the Lord's care, and as if the Infinite took delight only in his well-being and prosperity. It is unfortunately possible also to imagine on the part of the Lord a special contempt for the enemies of whom we are ourselves afraid. It is impossible for us to think that God can be friendly to men who are unfriendly to us. We thus, without intention and certainly without words, accuse God of invidiousness and partiality. There is great need for care in this direction, lest we grow in spiritual self-sufficiency and in the uncertain security of irrational and presumptuous pride. Rather let us think that if men have been our enemies they may have had some reason for their hostility, and let us diligently cross-examine ourselves to find out how far their opposition has been justified by something wrong within our own nature. It is lawful to learn from an enemy, and it is lawful for us to occupy the enemy's standpoint in endeavouring to form a true estimate of ourselves.

In this psalm we have an outline of David's conception of God. Some of the expressions are marvellously penetrating and marvellously beautiful. What can be sweeter than such words as these?—

“With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward” (vers. 25, 26).

In the thirty-fifth verse the Psalmist uses an expression which has comforted many a spirit and explained satisfactorily many a sacred experience,—“thy gentleness hath made me great.” This word gentleness has been translated “meekness,” and has been taken as pointing to him who said, “I am meek and lowly.” The meaning would seem to be that we owe our stability and enlargement to the forbearance of God. If he had been only all-mighty and all-righteous he would have crushed us and carried us away in a storm of derision because of our falsehood and vanity and selfishness. But he has carefully surrounded us so that we might have an opportunity to grow, become strong, and to mature our life in all acceptable fruitfulness. We owe all that is best and truest in ourselves, not to a culture we have either originated or conducted, but to the gentleness or forbearance of God, who has spared us and enabled us to turn to advantage all the blessings of his providence. In such verses as these we come upon a distinct and unchangeable philosophy. God is to us what we are to God. Wherein we are pure, we see the holiness of the Father; and wherein we are merciful, we share the divine compassion. We thus become as it were interpreters and reflectors of the divine nature. It would seem as if we could only know God according to the limit and quality of our own spirit. We must find the unknown through the known, the divine through the human, and make time itself into a symbol of eternity. Terrible is the thought, yet full also of joy, that man is the best interpreter of God. Whatever we may see of him in the works of so-called “nature”—their variety, their vastness, their simplicity, and their security—we see more of him in the spirit, the capability, and the growth of a little child. Looking in this direction for parables and illustrations of the divine nature, we feel how possibly true it may be that man was created in the image and likeness of God. We see also how true it is that

human gentleness conduces to human growth and social security. We owe next to nothing to violence. Mere strength may be devoted to purposes of devastation, but pity, love, forbearance, gentleness, of necessity conduce towards preservation, establishment, and security.

Whilst this whole psalm may be taken as poetry based upon history so far as David is concerned, it may be taken as literally true concerning David's Lord. Jesus Christ also had his great agony: there was a time when the sorrows of death compassed him, and the floods of ungodly men made him afraid: there was a time when the sorrows of hell compassed him about, and the snares of death suddenly seized upon him. Out of all this agony he came more than conqueror. The heavens darkened, the earth trembled, the rocks were rent, the veil of the temple was thrown down, and out of the darkness of Calvary there dawned the morning of the world. All these phenomena are now in process in the providence of God. Still darkness is the secret place of the Almighty, and the pavilion of the Eternal is in dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. Still God is in the midst of the battles of the world, and is invisibly reigning over all the tumult and fierceness of carnal men and ambitious empires. Things are working together—mysteriously but certainly—and the end of the co-operation will be the establishment of the Cross and kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The time will come when the whole earth will be filled with the glory of God. As for his enemies, Jesus Christ will beat them small as the dust before the wind, and his hand shall be upon their necks that he may destroy them. If men will not fall upon the stone and be broken, the stone will fall upon them and grind them to powder. Jesus Christ is yet to give thanks unto the Lord among the heathen, and sing praises unto his name in the uttermost parts of the earth. All this it may be difficult to understand as a mere matter of verbal criticism, but the heart knows it to be true, and rejoices in the promise of millennial light and millennial peace.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou hast made us, and not we ourselves. We are the offspring of the living God. In God we live and move and have our being. This is our joy, because this is our strength; and this is our terror, because herein is found the beginning of our responsibility and our judgment. Thou knowest what we are, what we can do, how many talents thou hast entrusted to us, and with how many opportunities thou hast enriched our period of probation; so if we are not faithful we cannot evade thee; if we fail to seize the passing time and say, Behold, we knew it not as a season sent from heaven, thy judgment will be just. Inasmuch as we live in thee, may we draw our law from thee, and walk by it steadfastly, thankfully, in growing delight of obedience; rejoicing exceedingly that we are not called upon to make a law for ourselves, but to read and to realize the statutes written by thine own finger. May we inquire for thy revelation, and read it with eagerness, and hide it in our hearts, and know it to be sweeter than honey, yea than the honeycomb—the very droppings of the comb, the sweetest of the sweetness. Thus may our life be ordered from on high, and be itself a revelation to other men of what the soul can be and do by being consciously in the living Christ and lovingly serving him who is the Head of Humanity. Thou hast made us apparently for a day only: our breath is in our nostrils; we droop and die; thou changest our countenance and sendest us away. Yet it cannot be for a day only that thou hast made us: thy purpose is greater, thy purpose is boundless. Help us to believe, therefore, that there is a life in reserve, a sphere yet to be revealed, an opportunity yet to be disclosed. May we live in the light of that further day, that brighter day, and abide in the joy and hope of that immortality which is in Christ Jesus—a living heaven, a living service, a service that knows no end nor weariness. Whilst we are looking forward to that higher sphere, that wider nobler life, may we remember that there are but twelve hours in this little day of earth, and diligently improve every one of them by being industrious in the service of the living God. Teach us what we ought to do, and teach us how to do it, that with simplicity, fidelity, and godly sincerity we may execute our mission upon earth, and thus become prepared for the greater mission now unknown. We pray thee to have pity upon us in that we are unworthy of thy love: we have broken thy law, we have stained thy name, we have wandered far from the right line; but thou lovest us nevertheless—yea, thou dost yearn over us with fatherly anxiety; thou dost listen for our coming home, thou art watching our return: therein thou dost show thy love, thy pity, thine exceeding care. All this we know in Christ Jesus thy Son. He left the ninety-and-nine and came after that which was lost, until he found it: the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. Lord, we were

lost, but by Christ we have been found ; we have entered so far into the joy of our Lord as to know the rapture of conscious forgiveness. Now bind us to the Cross of Christ by which we have been saved ; deliver us from all sin, darkness, fear, and take away from us the spirit that would apostatise us, luring us by subtler temptations to still deeper ruin. And that this may be so, let thy word dwell in us richly, and thy Holy Spirit never forsake us, and thy grace become magnified towards us in the proportion of our need. It is not enough that thou dost expel the evil ; thou wilt also implant and cultivate the good, and increase it until there is no room in us for evil, as there is no inclination for it. The Lord give us the sobriety of veneration, the joy of hope, the real blessedness of pardoned souls. The Lord build his temple within us, and dwell therein as in a chosen place. Give to every man a special revelation of truth, and an individual assurance of acceptance. Thus may blessing be individualised and multiplied, and abundantly and eternally increased. Amen.

Psalm xix.

[NOTE.—This is universally regarded as one of the most profound and affecting of David's compositions. Bacon says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, but not his will." God's will can only be known by his law. A marked difference between the style of the two portions of the psalm has been pointed out. The former portion is more varied in cadence, whilst the latter is more precise and condensed, nevertheless a pervading harmony has been recognised by the severest critics. It has been well said that the placing of these two ideas side by side is full of beauty and interest. To study nature and law is to cover the whole scope of pious education.]

A GRAND PICTURE OF NATURE.

READ the first verse, "The heavens are telling," rather than "The heavens declare." This form of expression keeps up the music of the remainder of the paragraph in the psalm referring to heavenly glory. "The heavens are telling"—are now speaking ; are not merely showing, as upon an infinite diagram, the glory of God, but are talking about it, repeating it in words which the soul can hear, and are eternally engaged in preaching the great gospel of beneficent nature. "The heavens are telling." Which heavens ? Not only is the word "heavens" grammatically plural, but suggestively a great host. There are many heavens. To which of the multitude innumerable does the rapturous poet refer ? The heavens of Day ? They are all whiteness, beautiful in glory ; sometimes without a cloud, or vapour, or stain of anything earthly—an infinite purity of light ; a great, holy, celestial summer. When the poet, touching us, as if to call us to an attitude of attention, says, "The heavens are

telling the glory of God," it is perfectly easy for us to enter into his high mood, and to return a responsive assurance that we hear the music and catch the tones of the ineffable eloquence. He has strained nothing; he has reached the word appropriate to the occasion; in associating the name of the Lord with glory so vast, so pure, he has not broken in upon any true sense of proportion, or violated any noble instinct of veneration. "The heavens are telling." Which heavens? The heavens of Night? Night has a glory all her own. She seems as if sometimes trying to keep the glory from us, so that we see but little shining glints of it—sparkles, and twinkles, and flashes of a hidden splendour. Yet she has a pride of her own—a skilful way of throwing back the robe and letting us see that there is much beyond. She will also condescend to be looked at in a way which would appear to have been divinely appointed—"through a glass darkly," a glass that reveals somewhat of distance, size, radiance, capacity, but there is no stopping-place in all the upward vista: where we pause it is simply for want of vision; the glory does not end where the eyesight fails. If, when conscious that there is universe beyond universe, in endless aspect, in infinite multiplication, the poet shall say, "The heavens are telling the glory of God," we should interrupt his song and say, "Let it be louder;" or, "Let us unite with thee in praising the majesty of light." Which heavens? The Oriental? They are quite different from the Occidental heavens. Dwellers in the western and northern lands do not see so many "patines of bright gold" as are seen by the Oriental gazer: the whole arch is ablaze with a white flame, or alive with innumerable eyes, as if all the galleries of heaven were thronged with angel spectators, looking down to see this earth, on which such tragedies divine have been begun, continued, and completed. We may, therefore, well ask, Which heavens? Every man has a heaven of his own. Blessed be God, it is possible to look upon the heavens and admire them without understanding their merely astronomical mechanism. The mere astronomer does not see the heavens. He is but a tabulist, keeping pace with himself in whole numbers and decimals, long lines of logarithms and other figures; he has always ink enough to put down what he has seen. The poet begins where the mere astronomer ends. He sees the genius of the whole. He speaks

about it in language worthy of the altar at which his praise is kindled. The humblest observer may read "the glory of God" in the heavens. This is a volume God has published for all the race; this revelation was not done in a corner. We have to inquire for a book, to ascertain upon what terms it can be had, and to ask for assistance in interpreting its hardest words; but the great nature-book, the heaven-page, the star-syllables—behold, all is free to the eye that can look and read. Do not let us imagine the heavens are not to be understood until the names of the stars are known. The stars have no names! We have degraded them by attaching appellations to them. The stars would not know themselves by the names we give them. Look beyond the name, the arithmetic, the size, into the spiritual meaning of all the balance and harmony and music, and thus acknowledge that "the heavens are telling the glory of God."

It is beautiful to note how soon the Psalmist institutes a comparison between man and nature—man and God. At first we think he is going to be wholly abstract, but an irresistible impulse, divinely started, soon draws him towards the making of comparisons as between the outward and the inward, the material and the spiritual, and thus to find in nature and in man a co-operative parable, nature having one part, man having the other part, and both the parts brought together to complete the significance. Thus the Psalmist says, "The sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race" (vers. 4, 5). This is a figure we cannot understand: hence my reference to the Oriental lands. The sun never plays the bridegroom part in our dull skies. He comes slowly. Sometimes he comes hardly at all, or looks upon the earth as if in a spirit of offence, standing back with more or less of haughty reserve and neglect. Sometimes he comes lingeringly: so we have here a dawn, a time when the sun is apparently beginning to come, or sending forth intimations that perhaps he will come in a given space of time. It is otherwise with the Orient: there the coming of the sun is like the bursting forth of a man from behind the curtains, which he has suddenly dashed aside, and the man is in full vigour and fire before we were aware of his intention to appear. Hence the difference of poetry as between

Oriental and Western nations. The Oriental reader could not understand English poetry about the coming of the sun—the earth waiting for him; nor could he understand our references to the uncertainty of the coming of the sun: the only sun he knows anything about leaps, starts suddenly with a dash, and illumines and transfigures the earth, so lately night-burdened, darkened with gloom. It is the same sun, but it is not the same atmosphere. Imagine the Orient and the Occident establishing competing sects, each upholding its own view of the sun, and each calling the other heterodox! The folly would be patent; the antagonism would be absurd. Yet this is the very thing that is done amongst Christian thinkers: the one thing forgotten is that the sun is the same sun, but the intermediate conditions are not the same. We are battling about the atmosphere, and forgetting the eternal steadfastness of the sun. Every man has a sun of his own—a faith of his own—a God more patent to himself than to any other man. There are as many religions, in the sense of aspects of religions, as there are men. It is an error to suppose that we all see the same aspect of God: but what we have to rejoice in is that all the aspects make up the one God. Were an Eastern poet to contend that Shakespeare had never seen the sun, we should not be able to estimate his criticism; perhaps we might even call him a fanatic; but when this very same principle comes into religious thinking, then we have society split up into sects, denominations, parties, decorated with especial banners, and degraded by especial mottoes. God is the same, Christ the same, truth the same, but the revelation is different, because of atmospheric peculiarity, because of individual temperament, training, opportunity for seeing things, and enlargement of mind. Better to magnify the unity of the sun, the eternal majesty of the light, than to be finding one another wrong upon grounds atmospheric, and because of conditions which do not hold good in equal degree in any two instances.

“Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (vers. 2, 3).

The meaning is that the heavens use no words. Where words have been used man has been exercising his little invention in the questionable science of nomenclature. The text should read: There is no speech, there is no language, their voice is not

heard. This is a great silent testimony. This is a spectacle to be looked at, not a message to be criticised. Where the message is delivered, criticism begins. Hence we have remarks upon "manner." To such awful depths of religious disgrace have we sunk! Sometimes we stumble at the message because we are unappreciative of the manner; then we are not earnest; we are not only foolish, we are dead men; not only dead men, but incurable fools. God, therefore, has used silent ministers to assist the great vocal ministry of exposition and persuasion. The heavens are inaudible in all their speech, yet intelligible. We can actually put into words all the appeals made by Night, if we look reverently and consider devoutly what is revealed on the blue page of the sky. A graphic writer of our own time has well said: "The greatest objects in nature are the stillest: the ocean has a voice, the sun is dumb in his courts of praise; the forests murmur, the constellations speak not. Aaron spoke; Moses' face but shone. Sweetly might the high priest discourse, but the Urim and the Thummim, the blazing stones upon his breast, flashed forth a meaning deeper and diviner far."

"What though in solemn silence all
Move round this dark terrestrial ball;
What though no real voice nor sound,
Amid their radiant orbs be found;
In Reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever singing as they shine,—
The Hand that made us is Divine."

"Day unto day uttereth"—literally, pours forth like a fountain. "Night unto night sheweth"—literally, breathes out, tells what it has to tell to the night that is coming on. So there is an astronomic tradition, a long-continued serial story, written in starry nights and sunny days. What talks the heavens have to one another! How the dying day tells to the day unborn its tale of experience—what it has seen, what varieties of landscape, what mysteries of life, what tragedies of woe! So the moon tells nightly to the listening earth what she has to say. These starry talkers have passwords of their own: they speak in the cypher of light; there is no word, no sound, no speech, no language. Poor crippled language would be of no use in that high converse. Language is always a difficulty, a snare,

a temptation, an inconvenient convenience. It brings us into all our troubles : it is when we speak that we create heterodoxies : could we but be silent, dumbly good—could we *look* our prayers and cause our *face* to shine with our benevolence, and our hand do a quiet work of beneficence, how happy would the world be! Words do not mean the same thing to any two men ; they may be accepted for momentary uses and for commercial purposes, but when it becomes a matter of life and death, time and eternity, truth and error, words are base counterfeits that should be nailed to the counter of creation as things by which a false commerce has been kept up amongst earnest and ardent men. Blessed be God for the silent testimony, for the radiant character, for the eloquent service. All history is silent ; it is only the immediate day that chatters and talks and fusses about its little affairs. Yet the dead centuries are eloquent ; the characters are all gone : the warriors are dead and buried, the orators have culminated their eloquence in the silence of death, the great solemn past is like a banquet-hall deserted ; but it is eloquent, instructive, silently monitorial. Why do we speak of our little affairs ? They have not yet come into shape ; not for one hundred years may they be talked about in sober wisdom and with clear, calm judgment. Let us talk of things that happened long ago : our fathers told us what wondrous things the Lord did in their times. Silent history—great, sad, melancholy, impartial history—the spirit of the past should govern the unrest and the tumult of the present.

Now there is a sudden turn in the psalm ; yet there is no lowering of its dignity.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever : the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” (vers. 7-9).

Some have thought that another author wrote the concluding portions of the psalm. Why ? Surely not. This man who spoke so rapturously about nature never could have left the subject there. He was not a mere nature-worshipper. He so looked at nature as to convince himself that somewhere there was something yet richer, more of the quality of God. We do

make such inferences in general life—why not in matters religious? A great French astronomer said—a long time before he made the discovery: Such and such are the palpitations from this quarter of the heavens, that there must be another planet not far. That other planet had never been discovered, but there were such signs in the heavens as could be wrought only by the revolutions and the light of some tremendous body. The astronomer kept his glass well to his eye, and watched with the patience of love and with the sobriety of wisdom, and in due time the great planet came within the field of the glass. At that same time a great English discoverer had been directing his eye in the same quarter; the discovery was made almost simultaneously—as nearly all great discoveries are. It is wonderful how God confirms things by the mouth of two or three witnesses, so that men in various lands, and speaking various languages, come always at the same point to the same conclusion. David, looking upon all the stellar host, and all the solar day, said, “There is more: there is a law; there is a nearer approximation to mind than mere stars can ever make; watch, and listen, and pray.” He found a “law,” a “statute,” a “testimony,” a “commandment.” There is one peculiarity about these verses which ought to be clearly noted—namely, every word can be proved to be either true or false. They expose themselves to an immediate practical test. “The law of the Lord is perfect.” Had that been a phrase complete in itself, it might have admitted of discussion, but it is only part of a sentence, the remainder being “converting the soul.” There we come upon ground which can be tested. Does the law of the Lord convert the soul? Put it thus: When the law of the Lord enters into a man’s nature, is he the same man in his temper, spirit, hopes, anticipations? Does he talk the same earthly language? Is he turned right round from east to west? Questions so simple admit of being answered with practical replies. It is not difficult to see a parallel between the action of the heavens upon the earth and the action of the law upon human nature. Does the sun restore the earth? Does the earth give signs of gladness because the sun has come? Does she answer his light with things green and beautiful, with songs a thousand-voiced, toned in every pitch of music and eloquence?

Does she seem to make haste to show him all she has? When she makes her garden she seems to be making it for the sun rather than for the owner or the gardener. The earth, in her strong summer mood, is a reply to the sun. As surely as such is the case is it that man, affected by the law, the testimony, the statute, the commandment of the Lord, is restored, beautified, enriched, and brought to his true and very self as God meant him to be. These are not matters that admit of discussion: we ourselves are the living witnesses. Where, then, is there any place for wordy argument—long and detailed discussion? The whole matter is settled on practical grounds. There never was a man who received the law of the Lord into his heart and obeyed it who did not instantly say that he was a new man—that he was “born again.” Failing this proof of regeneration, we are at liberty to deny that he has ever known the law or ever received it into his spirit.

So the psalm is a grand picture of nature, and a grand recognition of revelation; still, it is incomplete: it wants another touch. What can we have more than nature and revelation? We can have experience. That is what the Psalmist finally supplies. He begins to mourn and complain, and to feel his own infirmity, and to desire divine sympathy and direction. “Cleanse thou me from secret faults”—thou who didst make the all-redeeming sun. “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins”—O thou that dost hold the great steeds of fire in leashes that cannot be broken. “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer”—then I shall join the choral harmonies of creation; mine shall not be the one discordant note in creation’s infinite anthem; then all thy works shall praise Thee. “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins,”—literally, from arrogant men—men who seeing me above them, below them, around them, will not be law-burdened themselves; keep me in the society of the humble, the modest, the lowly-minded. To the babe thou wilt reveal thyself, to the little child thou wilt shew thy face; Lord, keep me back from boasting, blustering, arrogant men—licentious fools who would burst thy limits and try to be gods themselves.

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY God, thy sanctuary is on high ; it is filled with angels ; it is the home of the blessed ; from it thou dost behold the children of men, and thou dost send help, thou loving Father, to those who put their trust in thee. The tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth ; thy house is near our dwelling-places. Thou wilt send us a portion from thy table that our hunger may be satisfied ; thou wilt number us amongst thy guests, and cause us to eat and drink abundantly at thy table. Thou dost connect all the worlds, mysteriously and lovingly, so that we speak of the whole family in heaven and on earth. Thou art so teaching us the mystery of life, and revealing to us its infinite glory, that now there is no more distance, there is no night, there is no sea, there is no need of the candle or of the sun to show things as they are ; we are now citizens of heaven, companions of the angels, associates with the pure and the blessed ;—this is the miracle of the Holy Ghost wrought within us, little by little, like a dawning, expanding, growing day. Once we were blind, now we see ; once we thought heaven was above the sky—a beauteous image indeed to our child-mind—but now it is within us, if so be we love God in Christ Jesus and try to serve him with all simplicity and earnestness ; once we thought of the dead as gone away from us, now they are no longer dead : they have risen in our love and thought, they are the chief impulses of our life, they encourage us, bless us, enrich us : verily they live more to-day than when we could put our hands in theirs and look them in the face. Thou art changing all things : the water is becoming wine, the light is becoming heaven, the summer is paradise restored. Thou art giving us enlargement of mind, far-extendedness of vision ; so we are no longer humbled by the things that die and that press upon us with rude urgency ; we trample them under foot, and stand upon them as upon a hill which only helps us to see the further. We bless thee for all these upliftings, enlargements, and liberations of mind ; thou hast made us thy freemen, invested us with a glorious liberty, and entrusted us with a sacred promise. We come to the house of the Lord to receive help. The way of the week is often crooked : its days are so many difficulties, its hours are multiplied temptations, all its engagements so flatter us, or lure us, or tempt us, that we may forget the sanctuary of God ; but we come to the house of the Living One that we may ourselves live more abundantly—yea, be filled with life, so much so that there shall be no death in us ; then we will step down into the week and rule it, command it, sanctify it by the energy of the indwelling Spirit. For all thine help we bless thee : it has turned night into day, it has made for us pools—yea, and springing fountains—in the wilderness ; it has kept back the enemy ; it has given us a place of security,

and therefore an opportunity of growth. Bless the Lord, magnify him; yea, praise him with many instruments and with unanimous voice and unbroken love for his infinite kindness, his pity, and his care. Help us to live worthy of thy call. We cannot do so: every day we fall; we eat the forbidden tree, we listen to tempting voices, we know that we have done the wrong. Yet sometimes thou dost bid us fear not, for we are in a place of darkness that leads to a place of light; if so be we cling to thee, and hope on, and live on, all this dense darkness shall be dissolved, and we shall stand in the white morning, beautiful with all heaven's colour and rich with a thousand promises. We commend one another to thy care. This is the great blessing, this is the true friendship, that soul should pray for soul, and life should give life into the Eternal Hands. For all thy wealth of love we bless thee: we have seen it at home, we have seen it in the market-place, we have seen it in the cemetery—everywhere thy love is present, had we but eyes to see. Lord, open our eyes! Jesus, Son of David, that we may receive our sight is our heart's cry to thy pity. Whilst we are here in this place of shadow and gloom and trial, help us to work steadily, bravely hopefully; may we not mourn as the pagans do, falling down with heathenish fear in the day of adversity: in that day make us strong, that in its darkness we may illustrate the infinitude of thy grace and the fulness of thy satisfactions. Direct all men who are in perplexity, comfort all who are in sorrow, give rest to those who are weary, too weary to pray; and give comfort of a special kind to those whose griefs are of the heart, of the spirit, which cannot well be spoken, and yet which tear the soul and wound it, and fill it with despair. The Lord be with our loved ones everywhere—with the boy that left us yesterday, the child who faced the world for the first time recently, the friend who said good-bye that he might try the sea, and the traveller who has gone far away to make honest bread. Be with those from whom we are necessarily parted, and from whom we would never be parted a moment if we could help it. Be with these whom we shall never see upon the earth again; give them joy in sorrow, triumph in the hour and article of death, and may they have the promise and the hope of re-union, of fellowship eternal. The Lord bless the whole earth—all its nationalities and peoples, its tongues and languages. The Lord look upon all men who are in high power—on thrones, in primacies, leading the influence of the world; the Lord grant to such humbleness of mind, together with increasing insight, more religious reverence, and deeper interest in the common weal. The Lord hear us in all these things, and all the things which we ought to speak of, or think of, in our love; and send a plentiful answer from his sanctuary, and especially assure us, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Lord of Life, Saviour of the world, Priest of the universe, of the forgiveness of our sins, and our adoption into the spiritual family of God. Amen.

Psalm xx.

[NOTE.—This is supposed to be a relic of the ancient liturgy, an antiphonal Temple hymn; the assembled congregation sings one part, and the priest the other, whilst the king is offering sacrifice in view of the struggle against

the formidable hosts of heathenism. It has been supposed that the psalm was composed in Asa's reign. The simple grandeur of the style, and the cordial expression of trust in the living God, seem to point to the date as the time of David. The psalm is represented as a noble embodiment of the conviction that in the opinion of the heroes of Israel right is might.]

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE.

THIS psalm is often used at coronations. It fixes itself the occasions on which it may be used fittingly and usefully. This is a psalm which will not fit into every day or every set of circumstances ; this bird of song will only sing in the darkness. This is a fit speech for a congregation to make to a minister who is in sorrow or stress of any kind. It is also a fit speech to make to any Christian soul who is feeling the darkness and burdensomeness of life. Under all such circumstances the words have a right to be heard ; no apology is needed for introducing them. They seem to come up from eternity, clothed with heavenly dignity, and breathing celestial music, and they claim, without any assertion in words (which is the poorest of all claims), a right to be heard. Beside this, no heart in such circumstances can decline their aid. The heart itself is a witness to inspiration. Why torture the naked intellectual faculties to say anything about inspiration when they know nothing about it ? It is asking those to speak a language who never heard of it, or asking men to sing who have no sense of music. It is the heart that must determine these great questions ; and never was there a heart in sorrow that knew anything of serious and eternal things that did not at once recognise these words as a special and direct message from the very Soul of the universe. "My sheep know my voice." That is a much larger doctrine than it might at first sight seem to be : being in harmony with God, we know everything that God says ; that is to say, on hearing it we can at once decide whether God ever said that or not. A marvellous faculty is set within us, which we describe by the faculty of discrimination—a faculty which knows noise from music, right from wrong, the noble from the mean. A child has this faculty of discernment : "There is a spirit in man." We differ upon all matters of mere opinion, and all matters which are limited by words and terms and phrases ; but under all these things there is a necessity which the religious answer alone can satisfy—a cry

bitter with the soul's distress, to which only a religious cry can appeal. Psalms like this, therefore, are infinitely valuable because they speak the universal language. We are not careful to inquire into their literal antiquity, or the particular circumstances under which they were written or sung; they belong to all climes, to all languages, to all suffering hearts, conscious of a wish to be and to do that which is right. It is this that gives the Bible its place in history and its influence in human life: it belongs to no nationality; it speaks no dialect; it is a great mighty rushing wind from heaven, belonging to all the race and to all the ages with royal and divine impartiality.

"In the day of trouble." Have we heard of that day? is it a day in some exhausted calendar? is this an ancient phrase which needs to be interpreted to us by men cunning in the use of language and in the history of terms? It might have been spoken in our own tongue: we might ourselves have spoken it. So criticism has no place here: only sympathy has a right to utter these words; they would perish under a process of etymological vivisection; they bring with them healing, comfort, release, and contentment when spoken by the voice of sympathy. Is the day of trouble a whole day—twelve hours long? Is it a day that cannot be distinguished from night? and does it run through the whole circle of four-and-twenty hours? Is it a day of that kind at all? In some instances, is it not a life-day, beginning with the first cry of infancy, concluding with the final sigh of old age? Is it a day all darkness, without any rent in the cloud, without any hint of light beyond the infinite burden of gloom? Whatever it is, it is provided for; it is recognised as a solemn fact in human life, and it is provided for by the grace and love of the eternal God. He knows every hour of the day—precisely how the day is made up; he knows the pulse-beat of every moment; he is a God nigh at hand; so that we have no sorrow to tell him by way of information, but only sorrow to relate, that with it we may sing some hymn to his grace. The whole world is made kin by this opening expression. There is no human face, rightly read, that has not in it lines of sorrow—peculiar, mystic writing of long endurance, keen disappointment, hope deferred, mortification of soul unuttered in

speech, but graved as with an iron tool upon the soul and the countenance. Who are these that flee as doves to their windows? They are the souls in sorrow that are fleeing to the twentieth psalm. The air is quite blackened with them; they fly in one direction, and swiftly they flap their wings, as with the energy of despair—towards this psalm of comfort. A book filled with words of this kind holds its own, not as the result of some great battle in criticism, but as the result of speaking deeper words to the human heart than ever were spoken to it by any other voice.

The trouble is dignified by the very kind of help it needs :

“The name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion” (vers. 1, 2).

Then this is no skin-wound; this sorrow is not a passing tear; this bitterness and fret and wear of life cannot be ranked as a mere chafing of sensibilities. Learn the dignity of the woe from the dignity of the Physician who alone can cure it:—“The Lord hear thee.” There are speeches which men cannot hear; at east, though they make some appeal to the outward hearing, the speeches themselves are not heard in all the tones of their unutterable meaning. Here we often lack the faculty of discrimination, for we know not one sorrow from another, but include all human distress under some common appellation. If only God can cure the sorrow it must be of a peculiar kind; and if he will condescend to cure it there must be something in it which is not in any common form of grief. This is heart-woe; this is anguish in the very seat of life; this is mortal sorrow. “A wounded spirit who can bear?” Who can look into the heart, or dare, but God? We are physicians to each other up to a given point: we can speak to one another about the medicine, we can never provide it; or we can dwell with delighted gratitude upon the remedies it has wrought out, the cures it has effected, but we cannot ourselves administer it. It is something to be able to name it, to point to it, to call attention to it, to cause the mind itself to be awakened in the direction of its origin; but God himself alone can, so to say, open this bottle, and cause the healing drops to follow one another in the right number, and present the draught to those who die for want of it. It is well thus, and otherwise, often to be shut up to God. It is a grand

religious education to be above the reach of man and to be enclosed within the very solitude of God. They are little sorrows, merely physical tears, which can be treated by human voices and by human hands; they are the great agonies that will not, and cannot, be touched by any fingers but God's. At the last we may have some hint of the meaning of this; for we read that in the final summing up of earth's probation and life's discipline God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. They are not shed of themselves; they are not dropped out of the eye-wells by any action of the law of gravitation: they are removed by the hand divine, and when God shuts no man can open.

Nor can we know what true joy is until we have known what this true sorrow is. We cannot be converted until we have been distressed, impoverished, rendered utterly self-helpless, and have had a face-to-face interview with God in agony—God in Christ. It is a sophism of the most dangerous kind to suppose that men can fall asleep sinners and awaken saints; that by some mysterious and happy transition people who have been committing sin begin to pray, and hence on are clothed in white and are fit for the companionship of angels. Infinite may be the differences as between one experience and another, but somewhere there is a point which can best be described by the word agony—a point of surrender, a point at which self is laid down, nailed to the Cross, and in the strength of Christ's grace abandoned in purpose and in love for ever. This would no doubt reduce very much the number of nominal Christians, but such a reduction would be no loss to Christ. The Christian cause is burdened by those who know nothing about it. The Church can meet every enemy but the enemy of nominal consent and assent. Who, then, can be saved? That is a question to which there is no answer possible in words. The reply can only be found in an experience that never can be written, that can be but dimly and faintly hinted at by the most vivid and redundant eloquence.

Now the tone changes, as is customary in the Psalms. From the fifth verse—especially from the sixth verse—the whole tone rises into one of confidence and triumph. The morning was dull, the evening was fine. So have we seen it in life. We have often been afraid of the morning too bright; we have said,

"It is too bright to last." Concerning some houses we say to their occupants, "You do not get the morning sun here, do you?" and the reply has been, "No: here we do not get the morning sun, but soon after midday the room is filled with light; we see beautiful sunsets; we have long, warm afternoons and eventides." That may be best. Has it not been a sort of tragical experience to us that we have seen so many who had their sunshine only in the morning? They laughed, as was natural; they danced for very rapture of soul, which was not improper; but have we not known, as we saw this demonstration of delight, that probably the day would darken towards afternoon? We have seen the young minister in sudden popularity, developed all at once, quite the growth of one little hour—how triumphant! how delighted by popular acclamation! how highly-fed with public appreciation! Presently the brightness has vanished, and in the obscurity of a cloudy afterday the idol has been forgotten. Have we not seen men struggling in the morning when there was no light upon their window, raising themselves for a moment's relaxation, sighing—not the expiration of weakness, but a sigh that means there is still latent strength which shall be developed? Have we not seen them patiently working, confidently keeping on, pressing forward, persevering with that persistence which is itself a kind of inspiration—when lo! one slanting beam came to the workshop; then every moment after the beam broadened and made room for other beams, and the afternoon was bright, and at eventide there was light? It is sad when people have all their good fortune in the beginning of life. It is pitiable to see a man starting life with many thousand pounds, and with the world's key in his hand, opening what doors he pleases. It is a sad sight to see a well-dressed pampered child. Blessed are they who have had their clouds in the morning, and whose windows look westward, and catch the afternoon light, and have a great blaze of glory at the time of the setting sun. Those of you who are cursed with prosperity in the beginning of life should voluntarily renounce it. They are the wise men, and will eventually be the happy men, who have set their fortune aside and gone to live in the most destitute parts of the metropolis, that they might divide the burdens which weaker men are carrying.

The Psalmist says, "Now know I" (ver. 6). There comes a point of knowledge in the spiritual education of the soul. For a long time the soul knows nothing, can explain nothing, is groping after everything, but is quite sure that it is groping in the right direction. Then there comes a point of positive knowledge—a birthday—a day never to be forgotten. Such days there are in intellectual illumination. The scholar, opening his book, knows nothing; the first few pages are weary reading; he asks if he may not omit a good many of the pages, but he is told that not a single word is to be omitted. The reward is not on the first page; it begins about the middle of the book, but only begins to those who have carefully read every word up to that point; then for the first time the reader sees one beam. Now his interest in the book deepens; every page becomes an enjoyment, and he is only regretful when the last page is reached. We know the meaning of this kind of illumination in the acquisition of languages. For a long time we seem to be speaking incoherently, even foolishly; the sounds are so unusual to our own ears that when we say them aloud to any listener we smile, as if we had made a possible mistake, or might be mistaken for persons who had altogether misapprehended their natural talent and genius. A little further on we speak, perhaps, with a shade less hesitation; then mingling with people who are always speaking the language, we get into the hum and music of the utterance, and then venture our first complete sentence, and when it is answered as we expected it to be answered, a great satisfaction comes into our soul, and from that point progress is comparatively easy. These illustrations all help us to understand some little about the religious life. When a man first hears his own voice in prayer, it is as if it thundered. It is a terrible thing to hear the voice the first time in prayer to those who are naturally timid and self-obliterating. But there is a point of knowledge. The Psalmist reached it in the sixth verse. He felt the saving hands of God were under him and round about him, and his confidence was grand. After this, what would he do? He would set up his banners—that is to say, he would bear public testimony. There should be no doubt about which side of the war he was on. "In the name of our God we will set up our banners;" the heathen are setting up

their banners, and unfurling their flags on every height they can clear. "In the name of our God we will set up our banners;" the fact of our having a banner is nothing; the heathen have banners, and are not ashamed of them; the thing to be noted is the name in which the banner is to be set up; they are our banners, but it is God's name.

Now the Psalmist, being in triumph himself, passes easily into a mood of ridicule—high intellectual taunting—when he views the poor trusts of the world: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses." The chariots are of iron, the steeds are caparisoned, the show is one of pomp, but it is only show; the chariots shall be broken, the horses shall be slain. "We will remember the name of the Lord our God"—eternal name! They who trust in chariots and in horses "are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright." The end must test everything. Viewed within given limits, there is nothing so absurd as spiritual trust. Compared with chariots and horses, what is spiritual trust?—a ghostly, shadowy thing; a praying into the air; a calling up avenues that have no end—into heavens that have no God. See the chariots, count the horses, watch the gleaming steel,—that is trust. Within the limits we have alluded to, the judgment is right. The young man who said to the prophet, Behold all these chariots and horses! they are coming nearer and nearer, and thou wilt surely be crushed by the tremendous weight, was right; in the exercise of his physical faculties alone he could come to no other judgment. The prophet, quiet, serene, too powerful to be in a tumult, too dignified to be in any haste, too sure of God to have any fear of man, simply said, "Lord, open his eyes"; and the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and behold, the mountain was alive with angels, with chariots of fire, with the horses of Omnipotence. We are only afraid when we are blind. What we want is open vision, clear eyesight, a proper estimate of realities, and not appearances; so when Jesus passeth by we will say, when he says to us, What is your petition?—Lord, that we might receive our sight!

Psalm xxiii.

[NOTE.—Some think that this psalm was written by David in the early days of innocence ; but against this view verse 5 is quoted. Besides, it is doubted whether any youth could have had an experience so rich and large. Common opinion assigns the psalm to David. The images of the shepherd watching over his flock, and of the banquet where Jehovah presides over the just, are familiar in Hebrew poetry. It has been said that the mention of the House of Jehovah appears to be decisive against the Davidic authorship. Some have suggested that if David's fortunes coloured the psalm it must have been through the mind of some later writer. The twenty-third Psalm stands apart in all its most tender and fascinating characteristics. Imagination can hardly dissociate it from the royal shepherd on the hillsides of Judah, where he studied nature so profoundly and communed so deeply and lovingly with God.]

THE DIVINE SHEPHERD.

"The Lord is my Shepherd * " (ver. 1).

IT is vital that we should define God's relation to us, and our relation to God. Every one may have an image peculiarly his own ; an image which most clearly typifies the divine nearness and care, and through which, therefore, he can see most of God and understand him best. God is the infinite name—shepherd, father, healer, deliverer ; these are the incarnation of it, not in the sense of limiting it, but in the sense of focalising its glory, and subduing it into daily use and daily comfort.

"I shall not want " (ver. 1).

An indirect tribute to the earthly shepherd. Some titles are characters as well as designations. A shepherd that allowed his flock to want would divest himself of his character, and rank himself with the horde of hirelings whose business it is to fleece

* If we would trace the history of the word "shepherd " as applied to God we must refer to Gen. xlviii. 15 ; Gen. xlix. 24 ; Psalm lxxviii. 52 ; Psalm lxxx. 1 ; Isa. xl. 11 ; Isa. lxiii. 11 ; Ezek. xxxiv. ; Micah vii. 14.

the flock, and deliver it as a prey to the wolf. The assurance of nurture has here large meaning. It may be paraphrased variously : I am God's child, so I need not yield myself to anxiety ; I am religious, therefore I am provided for. Or the reasoning may start from the other and better point : God is for me, who can be against me ? God is housekeeper, so there will be bread enough. God reigns, the universe is safe. There is no selfishness in the reasoning : the Psalmist is not magnifying a little personality, he is stating the practical and universal sequence of fundamental reasoning. The violet is not immodest when it says in its mossy dell, The sun shines, I shall be warmed.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters " (ver. 2).

He knows what I need : he treats me according to my quality : he proves by easily comprehended blessings that higher benefactions shall not be withheld. Pasture and water are the earnest and pledge of truth and grace. Did we know things as they are, we would know that they are all parables, whose meaning is spiritual. Bread is sacramental. Providence is the visible and historical aspect of theology. If God clothe the fields, will he not clothe the husbandmen ? if he clothe the body, will he not clothe the soul ? if he feed the flesh, will he starve the spirit ? If we knew the earth aright we should have some understanding of heaven.

"He restoreth my soul : he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake " (ver. 3).

So the sweet singer has not missed the higher significance of his music. Already the green fields have lured him into the sanctuary ; already the "waters of comfort" have brought him to the river of God. This is the very purpose of nature. All the stars lead to Bethlehem. All the waters trickle to the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Oh that men were wise ! then all nature would be but the vestibule of the sanctuary, and all providence but the many-figured gate which opens upon the soul's storehouse. Soul-restoration is peculiarly the work of God. He alone knows that wonderful instrument, and he only can keep it in tune. "The inward man is renewed day by day !" Day by

day the soul must be judged, re-adjusted, fed, comforted by the Living One. The proof of renewal will be a steadfast walk in the paths of righteousness. Morality will prove religion. Sentiment will be crystallised in character. Is our piety rhapsody or service? Is our restoration a dream or a discipline? Do we know in our very heart of hearts that he who made the rainbow a covenant made the Cross the only way to heaven? These are the questions which shock the complacency of self-satisfaction, and bring men to penitence, confession, and prayer.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (ver. 4).

It is indeed the valley of shadows, the valley of night. However much the expression may be softened by Hebrew etymology and usage, we know what the valley is. It is ever before even the youngest life. It must be traversed, and the darkest part of it must be passed alone. Sweet mother cannot follow her child right through; and ardent love, the love which makes two souls one, must stand back in wonder and be made dumb with awe. Opinions come and go; laughter and madness have their times of riot and triumph; attention is arrested by politics, business, war, and pleasure: but there is the black, silent, gloomy valley, waiting for us all! Is there no escape? May we not fly on white wings away to the city of light, the home of bliss? We know the answer. We bow our heads, and our hearts are cold with fear. "We must needs die." "There is no discharge in that war." Proud man, boastful, foolish man, let the "valley" sometimes come within thy purview, and sober thee into a moment's considerateness!

"For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (ver. 4).

Then the pious boast is not irrational, or presumptuous, or sentimental. It is a sanctuary built upon a rock. The Psalmist will be without fear, simply because he is in vital fellowship with God. Nor is he left with the overpowering thought of Deity—a magnificent intellectual conception—he has something he can see and handle and enjoy, even a "rod" and a "staff." In many forms do these helps present themselves,—the written word, the palpable ordinance, the sympathetic friend, the remembered and realised promise,—all those may be as the rod and staff of God,

meant for inspiration and comfort when the darkest cloud descends upon the expiring day. The peculiarity of the Christian religion is that it is most to us when we need it most. The night cannot frighten it; the storm has no effect upon its courage; death owns its sovereignty and retires before its approach. This is the sweet necessity of the case, for God can know no fear, and to be in God is to be like God. "Thou art with me,"—my hand is locked in thine, my life is drawn from thine, my future is involved in thine; God and the saint are one. When death triumphs he slays not the saint only, but also God. Take heart, then, for this we know is impossible.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over". (ver. 5).

God is a hospitable host; he furnishes or spreads the table on a high mountain, and the enemy looks on with rage and impotence from the deep valley. God is the cup or portion of his people, and each can say, as in this case, "My cup is abundant—drink." God does everything for his people. Rod, staff, table, unction, cup, all are God's. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Truly, my soul, God treateth thee as a favourite and setteth on thee special seals. So every believing man can say. Each of us seems to be God's only child—God's one ewe lamb—God's chosen delight. But all this favour involves corresponding responsibility. Nothing is said in mere words about the responsibility, but it is in the very heart and necessity of the case. We cannot receive all and return nothing. Gratitude must find its own most appropriate expressions. I must judge my piety as certainly by its gratitude as by its mercies. No gratitude means that the rain of love has been lost in a desert of insensibility.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (ver. 6).

It has been thought that this reference to the house of the Lord is decisive against the Davidic origin of the psalm. Perhaps so, in a purely literal sense, but certainly not in the larger interpretation of the singer's thought. The house of the Lord is a wide term. Jacob saw "the house of God" in an unexpected place. Surely there is a house for the heart—a sanctuary not made with hands—a hiding-place and a covert from the storm.

Is not this suggested by the very words "for ever"? No man can literally abide in a literal house for ever. Man dies, stone crumbles, all things earthly vanish as if but a phantasm. But this sweet singer says he will abide for ever in a house that cannot be destroyed. The house of God is Truth, Wisdom, Holiness, Worship, Sacrifice,—it signifies nearness to God, communion with him, a perpetual abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. My soul, seek thou no other home! In thy Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, and they that trust him shall want no good thing.

This sweetest psalm holds a place of its own in sacred minstrelsy. By many figures may its place be signified. It is the nightingale of poems, for it sings in the darkness of death's valley. Yet it is a poem that trills like the lark high above green pastures and landscapes, yellow with golden wheat. Nay, it is more than all this, for it seems to be sung by some one high in the summer light, and thus to come down from heaven rather than rise from earth. Did some angel open heaven's gate and sing this lyric as the sun rose on the dewy pastures, and as morning made burnished silver of the tranquil streams? No—no. It is a human psalm. Even man may sing. Even sinners may celebrate "free grace and dying love." Sad is the psalmless heart,—orphaned, indeed, and shepherdless is he who sits in silence when all nature celebrates the honour of her Lord. Shepherd of the universe, seek thy lost one!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee that Jesus Christ has told us of his suffering and his death, especially that he has told us of his rising again from the dead, for no grave can hold his almightiness, and as for the darkness, lo! he openeth his eyes upon it and it fleeth away for ever. We bless thee that he has known the pain of death and the loneliness of the tomb, because, having himself suffered as the captain of our salvation, he is able to sympathise with those who are in suffering: he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust, and there is nothing in our life that he himself has not first gone through. There hath no temptation assailed us with which he is unfamiliar: he was in all points tempted like as we are: he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities: we have not a high priest who is far exalted above our lot of sorrow and distress, but a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, in whose great woe we may forget our light suffering which is but for a moment. We gather in his name; may he come into our midst and send a warm glow of new and sacred love through all our hearts. There are no words like his: we know his voice—it is the shepherd's tone, it is the gentle word, the soothing accent: it is full of gospel, it is full of promise—behold, thou dost give those who follow thee, O Son of man, great light and measureless liberty, and an outlook upon things to come, far and bright. Amen.

Psalm xxix.

[NOTE.—This is one of the psalms of nature. Keeping his father's flock at Bethlehem, David may have witnessed such a storm as is here described, gathering around the summit of Hermon in the north, and shaking at the last the wilderness of Kadesh in the south. It is believed that the psalm was sung on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. In modern synagogues this psalm is appointed for the first day of Pentecost. The Hebrew Psalmist ever remembers the personality of God in nature. He never confounds Personality and Nature as equivalent terms, though he always regards nature as full of God and as revealing God in every phase.]

PEACE.

“The Lord will bless his people with peace” ver. 11.

THESE words are the more remarkable as occurring in a psalm which sounds like a storm; or, to change the figure, they are like the calm sunset of a most tempestuous day. The

Psalmist says, The voice of the Lord is upon the waters : the God of glory thundereth : the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful ; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars ; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf ; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness ; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.—After declarations like these, who would expect to hear anything of Peace ? Are they not like thunder which shall continue for ever ? Yet it is even here, amid storms which shake the forests and make the paths of the seas bare, that we hear a still small voice promising the blessing of peace !

You know what peace is, do you ? Few common terms are less understood. Silence is not peace ; nor is indifference ; nor is insensibility ; nor is the quiescence which comes of selfish fear of consequences. There cannot be peace where there cannot be passion. It is only in a modified sense that we speak of a tarn, or a pool sheltered on every side, being at peace ; but when we speak of a peaceful sea we speak accurately, for the sea is exposed to forces which rouse it into terrible tempests. Peace must, then, be understood as a composite term,—as an affirmative, not as a negative condition. Some men have no sensibilities towards God ; they see him, hear him, feel him, nowhere ; not in the light, not in the wind, not in the day's story of gift and love and mercy ; they are in a state of moral torpor. Are they at peace with God ? Most truly not, for peace is other than death. Where there is true peace there is of necessity a right relation of forces ; nothing preponderant, nothing conflicting ; everything has its due. In the case of the heart there must be life ; that life must balance the entire nature, judgment, conscience, will, affection ; towards God there must be intelligence, devotion, constancy ; towards man there must be justice, modesty, honour. Finding all this, and we find peace ; finding a tendency towards this, and we find a tendency towards peace ; finding this in perfection, and we find a peace which passeth understanding.

These explanatory words should put us on our guard against

self-delusion, and excite the spirit of self-examination. Let us look at the text as indicating Specialty of Character. A particular class is spoken of,—not a world, but a section,—not everybody, but certain particular persons,—“his people.” In one sense all people are his; he created them by his power, he sustains them by his bounty; they hold the breath of their nostrils at his will; if he frown upon them they wither away. Is it not, then, true that in one sense all people are the Lord’s? In another sense all people may be the Lord’s; he addresses the world, he welcomes the nations to the fullest joy of his love; he draws no line of separation, but bids all men look unto him and live. But in this text the Psalmist uses the expression “his people” in a peculiar sense; and if we give it a Christian interpretation, which we are at liberty to do, we may regard it as comprehending all who have exercised repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,—all who are sealed by the Holy Ghost, and, consequently, all who direct their walk by the guidance of the Comforter and Sanctifier of redeemed men. In so far as we come under this designation we are inheritors of this final blessing,—this blessing of Peace.

This distinction is made the clearer by a special reference to those who set themselves against God, and so put themselves beyond the range of his blessing. We can supply a terrible background to the text. “There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.” “Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known.” “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” “The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days.” These citations show that “peace” is not an indiscriminate blessing. The sun shines and the rain falls upon all; but “peace” alights only upon those who have acquainted themselves with God, and made themselves at peace with him. What then? Shall we boast of this? God forbid! Shall we carry ourselves contemptuously towards those who are not enjoying the same holy comfort, the same deep sweet calm? Let us rather turn our peace into an appeal to seek theirs, and by the very ecstasy of our joy let us labour to make others happy in the Lord. In calling us to peace, God has not called us to indolence;

a deep sleep must not be mistaken for a deep peace. We must resemble in some degree the worlds which are at rest by reason of their velocity. The earth is at rest, yet no wing of flying bird can travel so fast; the light gives no sign of motion, yet no runner can give us the faintest idea of its speed. Rest is the ultimate expression of motion. God is at rest, yet energy is streaming out of him constantly to vivify all the creations of his power. We refer to these things to save the text from abuse, lest the alien should claim the child's heritage, and lest the child himself should forget his duty to the alien. Such is peace, and such are they to whom the blessing is given.

We have spoken of peace. But there is a peace that is false, against which we should strive with all our might. Some of the Puritan writers were very emphatic on this point:—

"A man that comes into his house at midnight sees nothing amiss; in the daylight he finds many things misplaced. Nature is but a dark lantern, when by it we endeavour to ransack the conscience. Only the light of grace can demonstrate all the sluttish and neglected disorders in our souls."—ADAMS, 1653.

"In two ways especially the devil pipes and lulls drowsy consciences asleep—by mirth and by business. Mark this, you that dwell at ease and swim in wealth. Your consciences that lie still like sleepy mastiffs, in plague times and sweating sicknesses they will fly at the throat; they flatter like parasites in prosperity, and like sycophants accuse in adversity. Such consciences are quiet not because they are at peace, but because they are not at leisure."—WARD, 1577-1639.

"The peace of an ill conscience arises not from any sound security, but rather from want of spiritual exercise. Herein like unto a lame horse, which complains not of his lameness while he lies at ease, but when by travel he becomes sensible of his pain, he cannot endure it, but halts downright."—DOWNNAME, 1642.

"If the pulse beat not, the body is most dangerously sick; if the conscience prick not, there is a dying soul."—ADAMS.

"Security is the very suburbs of hell: there is nothing more wretched than a wretched man that recks not his own misery; an insensible heart is the devil's anvil—he fashions all sin on it, and the blows are not felt."—ADAMS.

Such is the testimony of some of England's great preachers of other days. Their testimony is solemnly, awfully true. Possible to have something like peace, and yet be awakened into tormenting and inappeasable remorse! Possible to think one's self strong, and yet all the while to be rotting away at the very heart!

We gladly turn from this phase of the subject to point out the practical consequence which ought to flow from such a promise as that "the Lord will bless his people with peace." Surely such a promise should make the Church calm and hopeful under the most distressing circumstances, even though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. It speaks little for our vital relationship to God when we are disturbed by every sound of tumult. Union with God should mean participation in the nature of God; not mere connection, but spiritual oneness; not the union of a link, but the union of life. The good man may be violently tossed about as if God had a controversy with him, yet in the depths of his heart there may be a great peace. The very stress, too, that is put upon him will give him a bolder and richer character if it be accepted filially, and deepen the peace which it threatened to destroy. The good man should not read the surface, or trouble himself with the accidents of the hour. The apostles, when cast down, were not destroyed; when persecuted, were not forsaken. If God be for us, who can be against us? Let men who have no God tremble and be dismayed when portentous shadows stretch over the earth, and reverberating storms shake the atmosphere, and lightning flashes like the sword of awakening vengeance; but they who abide under the wings of the Almighty may

"The dark'ning universe defy
To quench their immortality,
Or shake their trust in God."

Two things are clear: Out of God there is no peace; in God there is perfect peace. The good man meets every day with a hopeful spirit, and will meet his last day with the most hopeful spirit of all. He will have great peace in the day of death. He knows what death means. Immediately behind death is heaven, and towards that he has been making his toil an aspiration, and his suffering a desire.

"Death is another life. We bow our heads
At going out, we think, and enter straight
Another golden chamber of the King's,
Larger than this, and lovelier."

No storm beats upon the upper land; no nightly shadows fall on the eternal light. But let us remember that we must have the

peace here, or we can never know it there; here we must utter the bridal vow, and prepare the bridal attire; here we must renounce the petty charms of mocking charmers, and lay hold on eternal life; here we must show the spirit, the high heroism, and noble patience of men who have entered into the love of Christ; here we must win the victory, there we shall wear the crown; here we must know the grace, there we shall know the glory; here we must suffer on the Cross, there we shall be established on the throne; here we must prove that peace is not an idle sentiment, there we shall know that rest is not a transient dream.

We know how the poet, standing in the city, longed for the open country:

"To hear the soft and whispering rain, feel the dewy cool of leaves;
Watch the lightnings dart like swallows round the brooding thunder
eaves;

To lose the sense of whirling streets, 'mong breezy crests of hills,
Skies of larks, and hazy landscapes, with fine threads of silver rills;
Stand with forehead bathed in sunset on a mountain's summer crown,
And look up and watch the shadow of the great night coming down;
One great life in my myriad veins, in leaves, in flowers, in cloudy
cars;

Blowing, underfoot, in clover; beating, overhead, in stars!"

With an intenser, purer, loftier passion, the soul desires the peace of heaven.

"There shall no tempest blow,
No scorching noontide heat;
There shall be no more snow,
No weary, wandering feet;
So we lift our trusting eyes
From the hills our fathers trod,
To the quiet of the skies,
The Sabbath of our God."

This for Chapel

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou dost train us to strength and lead us to peace by thine own way. What strange things thou dost permit us to see ; they shock our sense ; yea, sometimes our piety revolts, and we begin to ask our souls most painful questions. Sometimes it seems as if thou wert absent altogether from thy creation, or as if thou hadst turned away from it in disdain, and left all men to do what they please. We have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading themselves like a green bay tree, and we have wondered where their root was, and how they came to be nourished by the light and the dew of heaven ; they are not in trouble as other men : their eyes stand out with fatness ; their houses are full of beautiful things, and their stables are full of horses, and as for their fields they abound in grass and in corn ; and we have said to ourselves, Surely God hath forgotten his own children, and hath lavished his love upon men who never name his name. The evil-doer has out-run the doer of good, and has had rest and peace and plenty and fatness, when men whose souls are pure have been left without to lie down where they might, and suffer all the ills of contemptuous fortune. Behold, we have looked upon these things, and we have no answer to them. If they lie within the compass of time, then are we without reply to the mysteries which they present. Whilst we say these things our hearts go down within us ; yea, they sink like lead in the waters. Then a voice is heard, saying, Their time is very short, their rope is very little, their opportunity is but a moment long : presently they will consume like the fat of lambs, into smoke shall they consume away, and the place of their root shall know them no more, and their evil shadow shall be chased from the earth. So then we take comfort in the words we have read—for ever ; yea, for ever. Then any little measurable time set against this infinite period is as the twinkling of an eye, or as a watch in the night ; it is nothingness and disappointment. Then we hear still further music from heaven : Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for him ; commit thy way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass ; trust in the Lord, and do good. Such exhortations elevate us, bring us to a new level and tone of mind, and make us feel that we are not yet without teaching and without spiritual direction. Thou hast thine own way of teaching thine own school ; we cannot tell altogether what it is, but we have come to believe that it is well, wise, best ; we are now willing to do what once we could not do—to wait, to stand still, to expect and hope. This is thy miracle wrought in the heart. We praise thee for it. Once we were blind, now we see ; once impatient, now time is nothing to us : the days come, and linger for a moment, and fly away, and the years are rounded off and the hour of consummation draws near. We bless thee

for all thy care—tender, minute, full of detail, so that every moment has been treated as an eternity, and every pain as an agony, and every cry of sorrow and need as a mighty prayer. Thou hast anticipated all our wants : whilst we have been praying for them thou hast been spreading the table, so that when our eyes have been opened the feast has been ready. When we have said, We will hasten unto the sanctuary and tell God this, behold messengers have met us to say the prayer is answered. We thank thee for all personal testimony, for direct individual oath, sworn in the court of the universe and in the presence of men and of angels. We thank thee for the assurance that we are standing upon a rock, that what is over us is God's own blue sky, full of hidden stars and warm with coming summer. So now we have no pain, or fear, or grief, dragging us down into unfaith and despair, but we know that the word of Jesus Christ thy Son shall be realised, that thy kingdom shall come, that thy will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven, and that thy day will burn as an oven against all evil. We cannot give up this holy truth, this poetry of the soul, this revelation of God ; it is most to us when the world is least to us : disappointment helps our prayer ; the emptiness of the world suggests the fulness of heaven ; when there is no water in the channel, when our feet are pained and bruised by the rocks over which we pass to seek thy fountains, behold a voice says, The river of God is full of water. All this we have learned in the school of Christ under the discipline of the Cross and under the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost. We have learned this because of thy providence in the ages gone. All past time gathers up its fulness in our experience ; so that we are not ourselves only : we represent the generations that are passed. We increase the faith of the olden time ; we add to it our own experience, and speak it all with our own accent. Look upon men as they need to be looked upon. Too swift a glance would kill some men, because they are so weak ; look gently upon those, as if not looking : come to them as a dawning day rather than as a flash of lightning. Speak comfortably to those who are much cast down, whether through bodily infirmity, or circumstantial difficulty, or domestic perplexity, and breathe into such the spirit of hope. Comfort those who do not know what to do because of the many ways which lie before them—some full of temptation, and others hard with difficulty. Be thou the guide and light, and a lamp unto the feet, a directing voice in the soul ; then shall men be delivered from perplexity and led in an open way. Pity those who have seen how bad a master the devil is, and how hot are the wages of sin,—fools who have been led miles down the wrong road, and who have been evasive and false and equivocating, who have tampered with evil, who have compromised with wickedness and have gone near to being criminals, but who this day see how foul is the wrong road, how detestable is the evil spirit, how awful is the pit of hell. They have come back ; they are in thy house ; they are scourged ; they are bent down ; they feel that their bones are full of arrows, and that a spear is in their heart. Wherein they repent and shed true tears of contrition, thou wilt be pitiful to them, and merciful, with an infinite gentleness, and even they may be brought to see how good a master is Christ, how mighty a Redeemer bows his head upon the Cross. The Lord permit us to walk still in his way, and teach us by the sufferings of others how we may avoid some suffering ourselves ; may the

lessons of the day not be lost upon us; may the events of the time be eloquent preachers, discoursing of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come; and lead us to say to the living Father, Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. The Lord heal broken hearts; the Lord himself make soft the bed of pain and the pillow of weariness; the Lord set a lamp in the house at midnight; the Lord receive the prodigal with open arms. Cleanse us by the precious blood—the blood of Christ, the atoning, sacrificial blood,—the mystery of eternity, the mystery of love. Amen.

Psalm xxxvii.

A FAITHFUL WITNESS.

DO we not say that there are some subjects upon which only men of experience are qualified to speak? Is that law in the market-place, in the court of justice, in the family circle? Surely it ought to be. It seems to be charged with reason which the very dullest eye can instantly perceive. Are there not some subjects with regard to which, as to their exposition and application, nearly everything depends upon the character of the expositor and the witness? In some cases we say, What is said? But in other instances we say, Who has said it? There are abstract subjects, mere matters of fancy or opinion, regarding which any passing judgment may be taken into account, but there are other subjects—practical, patent, earnest, about which no one has a right to speak but the man of lofty character and ample and genuine experience.

In this psalm a man undertakes to testify who pledges his age and his honour to every declaration which he makes. It is satisfactory to have to deal with such a witness. Ingenuousness is marked upon his face; honesty is in the ring of his voice; he has his life-books with him—his diary, written day by day patiently and carefully, and he says he is willing to testify anywhere concerning great issues of life, concerning instances which puzzle the imagination and stun the conscience. It will be agreeable to talk with this old man. We shall pluck rich fruit from this well-grown tree; there is about him ripeness, maturity, solidity, and withal a fascinating kind of spiritual music, which makes even his judgment and his anger instructive as to moral issues. He is not a harsh man; he is not rabid, acrid, hard, but quite a genial old wit and yet most radiant,—now

so solemn as if he were conscious of the oath that is upon him, and now full of delight as if sudden Sabbath had quieted the tumult of the week and lifted him up into heaven's joy. He gains our confidence at once by recognising the difficulty of the case. If he had come to undervalue the case, saying, It is largely imaginary, this is but an invention of an intoxicated or perverted fancy, we should have put him out of court altogether, because the facts are not to be commented upon in that tone: they are black facts, they are painful facts, they are facts upon which we can lay our own hand, and laying it on such facts, we feel as if we had laid the hand upon sharp spears and edged instruments. The Psalmist says: I entirely take that view of the case; they are awful and bewildering facts; I cannot reconcile them with any theory of natural reason; they upset all the deductions of probability; likelihood stands aghast at the spectacle: there, however, the facts are patent, visible, demonstrated beyond all dispute, black witnesses speaking in favour of evil, and by so much discountenancing the government which we call good. The Psalmist says: There are evildoers, there are workers of iniquity, there are men who spread themselves like a green bay tree, there are liars, there are men whose whole heart is full of evil; they are not to be counted by ones and twos, but by great throngs and masses. Were they all to be gathered upon a hill-side they would make it black; not one green thing could be seen amid the shadows that would be cast upon the mountain. Yes, it is quite right to take a black view of the case; the wicked are millions strong; they are fat and well-to-do, they are borne down by weights of gold, and they edge out men who pray and think, and who love God. So far we like the old man's talk. When we are conscious of great pain and utter weariness we do not wish to consult a physician who trifles with our conscious disease. He gains upon our confidence as he enters into our feeling; if he can suggest words for some feeling we have not hitherto expressed, even the suggestion of words will help us to confide in his judgment: we say, This man follows the case; he is gifted with strong piercing sight; nothing escapes him; he is determined to make out the case first before he talks anything about his cure. We honour him for this; he is a wise healer. So it is with the Psalmist. If we ourselves had been called upon

to find words to express the position of the wicked, in many instances we could not have chosen words so exquisite, so fit, so adequate, and all-embracing. So far, good.

Now many a man can tell the disease who cannot tell the cure. What will he say in relation to this awful condition of affairs? He boldly takes his stand upon certain great principles. He does not palter with the case. Looking at the great wall that is to be thrown down, he does not attempt to throw cherry stones at it, or small pebbles; he says, This wall must be shaken down by the thunder of heaven, and by nothing else. Hear him. Mark the mellowness of his tone, the dignity of his posture:—

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass” (vers. 3-7).

We know the right answer when we hear it. Instantly about some replies we say, They lack dignity; they are sharp, not broad; they are clever, not inspired; they will serve for a momentary satisfaction, but because there is no deepness of earth they will soon wither away. The suddenness of this man's action is pleasing when the agony is so acute. He does not proceed slowly. He no sooner states his case than he instantly surrounds it with all heaven's light and grace. To have kept us waiting would have been to have increased our misery. We must know in the very first sentence the tone which the man is going to adopt and the doctrine which he is about to establish by illustration. So far we are satisfied. He invokes the Lord's name—not as a name significant of leisurely contemplation, but as associated with infinite activity, and as pledged to certain issues. The Psalmist does not hesitate to pledge God's name to the conclusion, so not only will he be convicted of a slip in logic, he will be convicted of a crime in religion, if his predictions be falsified by events. But how is the Lord to be treated? Granted that he is in heaven, and granted that his eyes are upon the children of men, and granted that there will be a final judgment—when,

no one can forecast,—how is God to be treated amid all this tumult, darkness, difficulty, and horrible stress? First of all the Psalmist says he is to be trusted :—“Trust in the Lord” : lean upon him ; do not touch him with one finger, as if by way of symbol, or acknowledgment, or temporary lien, but cast thyself upon him—body, soul, and spirit,—the full weight, no ounce taken out of the heavy burden. That is a summons to faith ; that is a challenge to reason. We must take time to consider that : the demand is so exhaustive and imperative. Who can all at once relinquish himself, and cast his whole personality and estate upon the divine name? Not only trust him,—God must be enjoyed :—“Delight thyself also in the Lord” (ver. 4). Do not let the trusting be a discipline, a hard work of penance, a hard and severe thing to do, but a positive joy, delight, passion of gladness. Who can answer that daring challenge? It tears us to pieces ; it shakes us in our fancied securities ; it bids us look at and trust and enjoy him who is not seen. Not only so. God must not only be trusted and enjoyed, he must be waited for :—“Wait patiently for him” (ver. 7). Are we prepared for these conditions? They all go dead against us ; they are not in the line of usage ; they are not in the line of desire. We are impatient, petulant, self-asserting,—we cannot wait. All this is a sign of incompleteness. The mature person can wait longer than the little child. The little child must have what it wants at once. The man can smile at the little child’s impatience ; he can wait a day or two, but even his power of endurance is soon exhausted. Impatience becomes unbelief ; unbelief becomes disbelief ; disbelief becomes atheism. There is a short course to the devil !

What does the Psalmist proceed to teach? Having laid down certain great principles, he sets up certain positive standards of reckoning. He says in effect : We must call time into this judgment : we must alter the whole field of vision. Some things are not to be seen if they are too near. You must stand back from some pictures before you will see all their meaning and all their music and mystery. In some instances you must let time elapse before you form a judgment. So we are told that history will judge the time in which we ourselves are living ; in other

words, men who are not now born, but who will be born a century hence, will pronounce a judgment upon the century in which we now live. If we allow that in history, surely we cannot disallow it in morals and theology. Wise men say, This is not the time to judge the events which are going on around us; there is a great tumult, a great excitement; political passion is roused; religious feeling is irritated: we must commit the issue to history; posterity will tell the value of what we are now doing. When the same claim is set up on the part of providence, surely it cannot be haughtily disallowed or frivolously rejected. The Psalmist, therefore, says in ver. 10, "A little while"; and in ver. 16, "A little that a righteous man hath." He has altered the weights and standards of the country. He has come in with a great authority to say, What you have been counting much is little: you are wrong in your theory of weights and measures; your standards need rectification: you must take the whole of your mechanical judgments into the sanctuary to be rectified by God; you must bring your chronometers into the temple to be adjusted by the eternal and infinite meridian. Now we begin to see a little light upon the bad man's prosperity. To be told, first of all, that it is for a little while, alters the entire complexion of the case. The spendthrift says: I have ten pounds a week income, that is five hundred and twenty a year; let me spend fifty pounds the first week, and see what it is like to live at the rate of two thousand six hundred a year. The fool is burning the candle at both ends; he is eating up his seed-corn—the very corn that he ought to be garnering to throw into the arid soil at the next sowing-time. "A little while"—a flash, and all is dark again; a bubble bursting in a moment, and leaving nothing behind but a frail reflection of its hue and tint; a little flutter, and all is over. A most ingenuous reply, and as profound as ingenuous. The Psalmist fixes upon the evanescence of all worldly pomp, and says: Really it is not worth fighting for; it perishes in the using; it is a momentary gilt which will soon peel off, or it will be cankered and destroyed.

Now he turns aside to the righteous man's "little," and taking it up in his hand he says: This outweighs the riches of many wicked. So then, if men have been proceeding by a false

arithmetic, what is the value of all their numerical reasoning? Though they may have carried out their cubing and squaring and extraction of roots to a thousand decimal points, they were wrong at the start, and the further they have carried their decimals the further they have prolonged their condemnation. The unit was wrong, the method of multiplication was wrong, and therefore to continue it is to aggravate the guilt which will be charged upon the mistaken calculator. Some "littles" cannot be exhausted; some sovereigns cannot be changed; they are always growing into more and more, not in arithmetical value, but in some sense in real practical uses. Many a time we have seen the end of our barrel of flour; we have put our thin fingers through the meal; we have said, This cannot last more than two days; and behold the next time we have gone to it, it is still sufficient to last two days longer; and again we have returned, after having satisfied our hunger amply, and we have said, Really we must have made a mistake in the first instance; there is quite a week's meal left now. If this were fancy we have common-sense enough to despise it; but having lived it we have honesty enough to avow it.

So the Psalmist is encompassing his case in a masterly way. Having set up certain great principles, and shown how God is to be treated in the midst of providential mysteries, and having changed the whole scheme of weights, measures, and standards, he next pledges his word as an eye-witness. He says (ver. 23), "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way"; and again (vers. 35, 36), "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found"; and again (ver. 37), "I have marked the perfect man, I have beheld the upright, and I am here to say that the end of that man is peace." This is not indirect testimony; this is not collateral witness; this is not incidental statement: it constitutes the broad line, first, of the accusation, and, secondly, of the defence. Now have we not seen precisely the same providences, the same allotments, and the same issues? Let us think a little. Where are the men whom we once counted great and strong and terrible when they took

up a policy of opposition? With closed eyes, looking back some thirty years, we see them all: we see many of them, as we then thought, well-dressed, refined, well-to-do, influential; they sneered at Bethels, and Ebenezers, Rehoboths, and other sanctuaries; they curled their lip at praying-men, and had secret and too subtle jokes at the expense of those who kept the Sabbath and read the Bible; they had white hands unstained by work, fair faces unripped and unploughed by grief, and their laugh was their chief argument against all theology, their sneer was the one arm which they used in assaulting the citadel of God. Where are they? We cannot tell; they have left no name, fame, inspiration. Their names are never mentioned. They have built nothing, endowed nothing, consecrated nothing. If some memory should challenge the recollection of others, saying, Can you recall so-and-so? the challenged recollection is puzzled—"no," or a reluctant or hesitant "yes." But they have gone—shadows, mockeries, the little laughers, the puny sneerers, the men whose church was in their pockets, whose altar was at the bank,—they have gone; and where are many of the other class, that prayed, and taught the young, and sacrificed with the poor, and visited the lonely; they live in many a heart; they are named with tears; they are blessed by the generation following.

Then two courses are before us: we can rank ourselves amongst the wicked—have a short life and a merry one, dance to hell's music down to hell's fire—we are at perfect liberty to join them: it belongs to manhood to deny or defy the living God; or we can, by the grace of the living God, join the other class—join those who trust in the Lord, who delight themselves in the Lord, who commit their way unto the Lord, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for the Lord. That is followed by immediate loss of a certain kind. That is followed by the laughter of society. That means the forfeiture of many an invitation—an invitation to talk nonsense and to eat and drink poison. That means the cutting off of many expenses. Some are not prepared to live at such a rate. It is too cheap, too poor; they want to splash and dash, and foam and rush, and churn the passing time into froth. Poor fools; *why* were they born? We can be students, worshippers, philanthropists, fountains of water in the wilderness, and lights

like beacons on hilltops in the night-time to guide poor wanderers ; we can live in the soul rather than in the body ; we can advance along the high spiritual line, asking great questions, considering great subjects, breathing great prayers, rather than asking frivolous questions and contenting ourselves with frivolous replies. But if we take this second course the Psalmist insists upon morality. Thus he says (ver. 3), not only "trust in the Lord," but "do good" ; then (ver. 27) he says, "depart from evil, and do good." This is no fancy heaven ; this is no poetic paradise : those who are serving God have coats off and both hands stretched out in labour, and how to be good in God's sight without attracting the attention of men is the supreme inquiry of the soul. So, then, the Christian religion is no pastime. We are to be faithful, watchful, painstaking. The Apostle says : I keep my body under, lest, having published the names of intending competitors in the race or wrestle—lest, after having acted as a herald, saying, So-and-so will run to-day, wrestle to-day, I myself having heralded them should become a castaway—not in the list at all myself, a mere announcer of other athletes, but an outcast myself. From the beginning of the Bible to the end the great exhortation is : Cease from evil ; learn to do well ; wash you, make you clean ; do good ; be watchful ; observe the laws of discipline ; for only in so doing is there safety. The idle man is caught at odds ; the sleeping man is slain in his slumber ; only the watchful servant will be ready, come when his Lord may, at the cock-crowing, at the dawn, at high noon, or in solemn midnight.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our souls thirst for thee: thou art the living water: the river of God is full of water! We know that thou alone canst quench the thirst of the soul; we hear the voice of Jesus Christ thy Son saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: we hear the voice of the prophets crying, Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters: we hear many voices saying, Come: the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; let him that heareth say, Come; let him that is athirst come; yea, come, let him drink freely of the water of life. We bless thee for this burning thirst; we thank thee that having drunk up all the rivers of time and pleasure we are still athirst for water beyond. It is for the living water that we thirst; if any man drink of the wells of earth he shall thirst again, but if any man drink of the water of Christ he shall never thirst, but the water which Christ giveth the man shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. Lord, give unto us this spring water, this water that comes up from the rocks, and which never can be dried by scorching suns. Even in the wilderness thou wilt find water for us, and pools in desert places. Regard us as those who are now subjected to the wear and tear of life. Thou knowest how cruel this life of ours must needs be, chased and hunted and persecuted, and affrighted by evil presences every hour, tested by loss and pain, and brought oftentimes into utterest despair: Lord Jesus, help us; Saviour of the world, open our eyes, open our ears, that we may see and hear the living messenger of God. Specially help those to whom life is a daily burden; hold thou the lamp above the page when they read of whom thou hast elected to be thy ministers and evangelists. Be with those who have to find what joy they can in loneliness, for the world knoweth them not. The Lord heal our afflictions, dry our tears, direct our way, and at the end cause us to say, Blessed be God for sorrow, because but for this sorrow we had not known the truest, tenderest joy. Behold us at the Cross, where no man ever prayed in vain. Amen.

Psalm xlii. 1

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

THIRSTING FOR GOD.

WHY does the hart pant after the water brooks? Why does not the hart go quietly and take its draught of limpid water? Why this panting, why this heart-beating, why

this pulsing all over? See how the poor beast pants, quakes in distress! The little birds go and take their sip of dew with decent quietude; they make no stir or tumult. Why then should the hart pant? for the term is energetic, indicative of an excited state of blood. We need some other word here to explain the situation; put in the word "chased" or the word "hunted," and we have the idea:—As the hunted hart, the hart chased by hounds; as the hart flying from the enemy, more dead than living; as the overrun, overborne, imperilled hart pants and cries for the water brooks, so . . . then we fill in our human experience; for if we are living any life at all we are hunted and chased, persecuted, threatened. If we are living quiet and unassailed lives, moving about at our own pace easily, depend upon it we are giving the enemy no distress; he is quite content to have it so, he knows that men in that condition cannot drink much water; they do not feel their need of it. It is hunted souls that pray, threatened, chased souls that cry out mightily for the living God. Until we are sensible of being hunted we cannot pray much. We can pray dimly, respectfully, fluently, and in many huddled and incoherent sentences ask God to do something without ever caring to test the answer; but when the breath of the hound is upon our neck, when his very next spring will bring him upon us, and we shall be overthrown in a terrific confusion and fear, then we begin to pant for the living God. Away with your praying, and let us have panting, for your praying may be but a mechanical exercise, tribute paid to custom; but panting means prostration, earnestness, weakness of a kind which is the beginning of strength. How very much cool praying we have, and what very delicately calculated compliments have been paid by watching critics to that kind of praying,—so quiet, so restful, so measured, so easy altogether. Far too much so, ruinously so. Who shall take the kingdom by force? The violent. You do not want the water if you ask for it in that tame tone.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so . . ." The "so" is balanced by the "as." These words of manner must be equal the one to the other; the hart will be ashamed of them if it should ever come to know that so quiet, tame speech addressed

to heaven is supposed to represent its earnestness when it is hunted by furious hounds.

“As the hart . . .” Then this soul-panting after God is natural. Always distinguish between a natural and an acquired appetite or desire. Whatever is natural admits of legitimate satisfaction; whatever is acquired grows by what it feeds on until it works out the ruin of its devotee. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks . . .” No hart ever panted after wine; no bird in the air ever fluttered because of a desire to be intoxicated. As the hart panteth after water, God’s wine. The appetite or the thirst, then, is natural, inborn, divinely implanted or created; and when we lose or leave the line of nature we become weak, infatuated, lost. Carry up all your instincts and impulses to their highest utility and suggestiveness; be very careful that you do not intermix with them acquired, temporary, polluted appetites and impulses. Tertullian says the natural response of the human heart is Christian. You are very fond of quoting old theology, why do you not quote Tertullian? You are fond of patristic literature, especially where you can only read a line here and there and make no sense of it, why do you not quote this testimony of an old writer? It is a noble testimony, it is a true testimony. We have done injustice to nature if we say it does not know God or care for God; when a right appeal is addressed to man his response is an affirmative answer. The understanding needs God, the heart, in all its tumult of emotion and all its agony of dissatisfaction, needs the living One, who alone has the fountain of living waters. It is the unbeliever who is unnatural. A man has to overthrow the whole system of the universe when he becomes an infidel; that is to say, he has to overthrow it so far as it is a basis of calculation, so far as it is a unit which can be utilised in working out all the great problems of experience and destiny. It is the infidel who works all the destructive miracles. When a man prays he is himself, he is realising the purpose of God in his creation; when a man goes to the sanctuary he is then in his best mood, he is in his finest aspect and condition. The sanctuary is not a stone building put up by human hands, it is his Father’s house, a rough emblem of the house heavenly. Do not suppose, therefore, that prayer is

an acquired habit. Prayer represents the soul in its divine purpose, the soul at its best, the soul with the sunshine on it. It is natural, in the profoundest sense of the term, to seek God ; it is perverted nature, fallen or corrupt nature, that flees from the divine presence.

“As the hart panteth . . .” That would be a poor place to stop at ; there is no punctuation after the word “panteth.” God is not mocked, nor will he mock his earnest creatures. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks.” Who made them ? Why, the brooks were there before the hart was ; the provision was made before the need was felt. See how one part of life is balanced by the other. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks.” How knew the hart that the water brooks were what he wanted in the time of his burning thirst ? Doth not nature herself teach you ? Is there not a presence within you always teaching you alphabets and simple reading books, and the higher literature ? Who found out that water would be a good thing to take when the tongue was parched with thirst ? Did any bright angel say to the hart, Now in the present condition of your temperature what you really need is a draught of this limpid water ? The hart knew that without being told ; the moment the hunted beast saw the water brooks, there he was. The idea to fix the mind upon, however, is this—that provision is made for every legitimate impulse, aspiration, desire, thirst of the soul. Can we accuse God of the unpardonable cruelty of having created an appetite and forgotten to provide for its satisfaction ? “Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved !” is the cry of heaven’s hospitality. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for these capacities shall all be filled to overflow. Why then are you looking round to see what you can invent for the satisfaction of your thirst ? Can you invent more than a river, a fountain, an eternally-springing water ? These are God’s provisions. You can make mixtures of your own, and you can so mix your inventions as to increase the thirst which they momentarily allay. All man-made drinks help to make intenser the thirst to which they address their hypocritical, their false, their costly appeal. Nothing can quench thirst but water—water—God’s wine.

"As the hart panteth after"—goes out in desire of. Why did not the hart satisfy itself from within? Does not the hunted beast carry its own supplies of food and drink? Do the young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God? Why do they not turn in upon themselves, saying, Lions carry their own bounty, lions are indebted to nothing external, lions feed upon that which they themselves carry within? The cry of all nature is for something beyond itself. If no provision has been made for that cry, then God has mocked his creatures, and is therefore no longer God, we cannot say concerning him, "God is love." We have not enough within ourselves; we have to go out for everything, and the going does us good. Blessed be they who have to go a long way to church. If a man shall turn in next door to the sanctuary the probability is he will never go to church at all; when he is there, he is not there. It is the walk that helps us to pray; it is the journey that becomes part of the sacrament. We have to go out for knowledge. The most learned man in the world never left his own son his personal knowledge of the alphabet. He left him his penholder and gold pen. What a mockery!—as who should say, Now, dear boy, take this gold pen, and do what I did; begin where I ended. Every man has to go outside of himself for his alphabet.

So much for the hart, chased and panted, hunted, hound-pursued: what of the human soul? "So panteth." That word "so" must be interpreted in all the length and breadth of its meaning if we would understand this text. All nature pants after something else in nature. The flowers every morning pant in their sweet, gentle way for the rain; they cannot go to it, so the rain comes to them. That is how dear Mother Nature treats her household. The hart has to go after the water brooks, but the water brooks in the form of rain have to come after the flower. They cannot move an inch towards the fountain; but they know about it, they are quite sure it is there; and is there not, to poet's dreaming eye, some look of expectancy in the flower as it watches the gathering cloud? The harvest pants in its speechless way for the sun. Sometimes the harvest says, I do not want any more rain, I have had too much rain; I want long days of sunshine; I am almost ripe, I feel as if in one week more I

should be like gold, but just now, for want of the sun, I feel wet and shivering and self-disappointed: oh, I cry for light, for heat, for cloudless days! Everything in nature wants something else in nature, and thus the commerce of creation is kept up, the great free trade of natural elements communicating with one another is maintained. The bees—where be ye for, winged ones? what seek ye?—the flowers, the pollen; we seek food; we have a great factory to keep going, and we are out early to make a good day of it. Have you no honey within yourselves? No. Is it an absolute necessity that you must come out in this early morning and continue all day working in this sort of way? Yes. That is how God keeps house. If any man hath undertaken to make his own gods, let him have his home-made deities, a whole closetful of them if he likes, a whole museum-full if it so please him, and let them do what they can for him when he wants them. Men go out for the landscape. A man is not complete without the summer. A man may go to the mountain for beauty or grandeur; true: but he goes to the mountain for something more. Nature is not only beautiful, flowery; nature is medicinal. The sea is the doctor, the mountain is the physician. Old loving Mother Nature has her own drug stores; frequent them, and you will seldom go elsewhere. There is not a mountain in the world that is not helping the health of the world. The great Atlantic or any of the great seas are so many great sanitary powers. They are not merely so many miles long or broad; they are sanitive agents. All the little flowers are doctors. If you were to go out ever so heart-sore, you might get better by talking to a primrose. Lift up your eyes, behold who created these things, suns and stars and systems. He who rolled the stars along counted the hairs of your head.

“So panteth my soul after thee, O God.” Yea, for nothing less. Man needs all God. Every sinner needs the whole Cross. Every flower needs the whole solar system. Some have attempted to calculate how much light falls upon this little earth-vessel, and they cannot calculate all the light that falls here because enough rolls off the edges to fill with glory and with summer unnumbered worlds like ours. In my consciousness of sin I need every drop of blood the Saviour shed on Calvary; if

I had not the very last drop I am still conscious of being undelivered, I am a soul ill at ease. Herein is the mystery of divine passion and love, that we can all have the whole,—a mystery, mayhap a contradiction in words, but a sweet reality in experience. You could have all the sun. The monarch may have the whole sun, and the little mendicant far outside the palace can lie in the sunshine all day. It is not in the power of potentates to take the whole sun in any selfish way. When they have had satisfaction of sunlight the meanest beast in the forest can go out and bathe its face in the sunlight. Nothing less than God will satisfy the panting soul. We have drunk up all the little streams and rivers; we have taken them up as a very little thing, and still the heart has been sore with thirst. Yet the soul of man can do with nothing inferior. We know the true God, here described as the living God; we cannot do with a deaf deity, we can have no relation whatever to a merely historical divinity; we must have a present God, a present Saviour, a present Spirit,—in us, living in us, abiding in us, supping with us, a night meal, a hospitality that takes the hideousness out of night.

“For thee, O God.” Then for nothing strange. As the water brooks were made for the chased or panting hart, so God lives to satisfy the soul of man. There is nothing strange in the relation; whatever there is strange in life is in the non-relation or the unrealised relation between God and the soul. Herein see the greatness of the soul of man. What does that soul need to fill it and satisfy it, and quiet it, and give it all its possible consciousness of glory? It needs the living God. Herein is the origin of man. We may form opinions about this detailed process or that, as to a direct creation of the human form out of the dust, or an evolution of human nature from microscopic germs and plasms; so be it, the soul needs God, the soul cries out for God. Atheists themselves are intermittently religious. Even God-deniers are in some degree in an unconscious sense God-seekers. Life is thus a tragedy, a mystery, a self-contradiction, a great agony; and sometimes men are more infidel in words than they are in feeling. Men become angry with themselves, petulant, self-chafed, and they say things they do not mean in order, as it were, to goad the soul to say the right thing. If men have had

no experience of these mysteries, it is not in the power of the human teacher to bring them to such knowledge. To live we must die. Here you may judge yourselves by your aspirations : what do you want ? what do you pant for ? what do you need ? If you can say, " Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee ; Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I want a higher life, a broader, clearer conception of discipline and duty and destiny," though you fall seven times a day the devil shall not rejoice over you ; he shall still say about you, This man cannot be damned ; I drag him through perdition, and he comes out praying ; I mock him, I disappoint him. I inflict upon him innumerable and intolerable pains, and no sooner do I release my hold for one moment than his whole soul bends itself as if in an attitude of prayer. Thus, let us mock the devil, and bring glory to God. How can we attain this great position, realise this sacred relation, but for him who is the Son of man, the Son of God, our Advocate with the Father, the Daysman who is able to lay a hand upon both and make reconciliation ? Jesus revealed the Father, Jesus brought us to the living water. His sweet voice, all music gathered up into one solemn and pensive yet resonant tone, says, " If any man thirst"—Lord, we all thirst ; I thirst, thou wounded Lamb of God ; we all thirst : go on, we interrupt thee because our thirst is so scorching—" If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." That is the hospitality of love. That is the offer of Heaven.

Psalm xliv. 1.

"Our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days."

THE GOSPEL OF PROVIDENCE.

SO, we are not inventing a modern providence. The idea of providence—personal, domestic, and imperial—is not a new idea ; we have the advantage of immemorial time. You are fond of antiquity ; you go wild over it in some directions. Only point out something that is hoary and dateless, and into what ecstasy people are flung ! I do not ask you to believe in mythological antiquity, but in historical time. The Hindu imagination was independent of arithmetic ; in the Hindu chronicles it is casually mentioned—the historian tells us just in an incidental way—that one of the kings reigned for the period of seven-and-twenty thousand years. That is not that kind of antiquity to which we now call attention. The Psalms are historical ; they can be traced day by day ; we can go back to the very time of their writing. They were not written yesterday, they were written thousands of years ago ; and here the minstrel says, "Our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old." So we are standing upon a line that is historical, real, verifiable ; and the first truth that stands up before us is that the idea of providence—personal, real, individual, secret, tender, gracious—is not an idea of yesterday, but venerable, immemorial, and we take up the sacred song this day, and sing it without abatement of spiritual passion or cooling in any degree of gratitude and zeal.

He who rises to dispute this providence must be either a very great man or a very little one ; there can be nothing common about him. A man who rises to contradict the centuries ought to be sworn before he gives evidence ; we cannot have any frivolous chatter upon this great question ; we cannot have

speculations and dreamy suggestions, and partial, lackadaisical scepticisms; the man who rises to contradict this testimony must be sworn. Who is he? Whence came he? What is his title to speak? How is he credited in the market-place? With what authority is he clothed? If this were a quotation from mythological writings, if it professed to be a revelation granted to mankind millions of years ago, we should be lost in the infinite figures; but we are dealing with a Book the very ink of which we can trace; and if men four thousand years ago stood up armed and strong, and sang the providence of God in loud and cheerful and grateful and resonant songs, and if to-day we do not alter a syllable of the hallelujah or the anthem, we have, at all events, a long and deep historical basis on which to stand.

Providence is a revelation. There is a Gospel of providence as well as a Gospel of forgiveness. We must enlarge our conception of the term "Gospel" or we shall hinder the progress of Christian civilisation. The Gospel is not a set of phrases to be found in certain books only; it is the mysterious spirit of the age; it is a light that looks out of historical events, a voice that sounds in the night-time along all the lines of life; it is the morning newspaper; it is the great battle; it is the splendid victory; it is the new feeling of confidence that God is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. The Gospel is not a word of six letters or of two syllables. We wrong the Gospel by limiting it to any number of letters. We repeat, as the result of personal observation, and corroborating in some feeble degree the grand historical testimony, that there is a Gospel of providence as certainly as there is a Gospel of redemption. Is it nothing for you to be assured that the foundations of your house are strong? Good news does not take up one set of words only, good news calls for all great words and noble sentences, ay, and for all musical instruments, and it says, "Everything that hath breath announce me. Repeat me, and let all heaven be filled with the musical thunder." God did not come into the race a thousand years after it was created; the race is in him, its root is in his duration. All things are under his hand. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.

There is a providence of facts. When the Psalmist and the ancient seers and prophets spoke of the law of the Lord, they did not confine their observations to that which was written with pen and ink. They were observers in the ancient time as men profess to be now. Inductive reasoning is not a little invention of the day before yesterday; in the Bible you have all the wealth of that reasoning baptised, sanctified, followed up into glory. The law of the Lord was written in the movement of nations, in the development of ideas and purposes, in the destination of the good man, in the issue of all wickedness. The men sat, and looked, and noted, and wrote memorandum book after memorandum book, if we may so modernise the incident, and when they had filled up their paper they said, "This is the law; this is the point of pressure; this is the meaning of the secret behind." Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would say that the newspaper is the supplement, and the daily incident the daily annotation of the one eternal word! If you were believing only in something that is written, that had no counterpart in the actual life around you, and no confirmation in your own consciousness and experience, you might be living a highly speculative life; but if any man in all the school of wisdom can confirm his doctrine by living proof the Christian is that man. When we look back upon all the way of history so far as it is revealed to us, it seems to me to be more difficult to deny providence than to believe it. It appears to me that the difficulty is on the side of unbelief. If we had to deal with a single instance only, the case would be so limited as to be vexed by much personal contention; but a whole volume of history lies wide open. What about all the purposes that have been countervailed, the schemes that have come to nothing? What about those who have dug pits, and fallen into them themselves? What about the towers, half built and then thrown down? What about the law of checking and limitation and restriction, the mysterious unwritten law of boundary—thus far shalt thou come and no farther? These are not church words; these are not chapel expressions; there they are on the open page of the world's own history. Looking at them, endeavouring to connect them and to give them shape and almost personality, we should feel that the difficulty would be on the side of unbelief

and not on the side of faith in view of the proposition that God is, that God rules.

If we cannot thus prove the objective existence of providence, we can do something which is equal to it. What kind of men does this faith produce? How does the creed come up in the life? Let us not fritter away our time in discussing the creed in words and syllables; let us get away from merely intellectual contest and skilful encounter of cunning use of words, and ask this question, What kind of men does this creed make? How does the creed come down into the life, and touch it, mould it, shape and direct it? We are willing to abide by the answer; to judge the works, as Christ challenged his contemporaries to do. We cannot find the source, it may be, but let us drink the water and say what kind it is, and be honest, healthy of soul in giving our evidence. There is a faith which says, "God is, God rules, God judges. God will bring all men into account; nothing happens by chance; the eternal decree includes the boundary and the issue of all things." How does that creed operate in the life? It ought to make courageous men. Given the conviction that God has sent me, ordained me, and put his name within me, and where is fear? There is no night in my marching; the wilderness is a garden and the desert is a ground full of roses, so long as that gladdening, inspiring faith burns in my soul. Any faith that will produce such courage is, presumptively, well founded, and must, presumptively, have grand issues. Moses says, "Lord, whom shall I say sent me? When they ask me his name, what shall I say?" If a little name had been given to the man there had been no access of power in heart or arm; but charged with this name, "I AM that I AM," Pharaoh became an object rather of contempt than of dread. The man came down upon Egypt from infinite heights; he did not struggle up to it as if the situation were greater than his resources. The man in whom this gracious faith rules ought to be a man in the enjoyment of the deepest peace. He ought to sing night and day, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." There is peace in his heart. "All things work together for good

to them that are good"—that is a gospel—the good never left alone, the good never left to run any risks, the good pledged from eternity; the army that is with it, the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Admit that intellectually, and you will go away and be as troubled as ever; realise it spiritually, let it enter into the making of the soul, and be the soul's very protoplasm, the force of the soul, then your peace will flow like a river; no storm can trouble it; no wind can toss it into more than momentary agitation. The faith that produces such peace—and the Christian faith does produce it—is, presumptively, divine, authoritative, final.

We have thus ventured to trace all these speculations, suggestions, or nominal revelations to providence; thus, too, would we test all theology. How does the theology come out in the life? To believe in the Triune God, and to rob our neighbour, is the vilest blasphemy. Do not affront me with impertinence, and say you are orthodox, because you believe so much theological ink. If your life is heterodox "you are of your father, the devil." Let us try all Christian propositions and doctrines and theologies by this one grand test—What is the fruit? What is the work? What is the result? What is the life? And the life being such as God loves, the faith must be of the same quality; the tree is never better than the root.

In reading the Biblical description of providence and its operations in individual histories and imperial developments we feel no difficulty whatever as to the merely extraordinary or romantic element which may distinguish the story. Your own life is a romance. It is only commonplace for you, because you have come into it a day at a time; but if you could have taken a seven years' stride, you would have gone from commonplace into the incredible, not to say the miraculous. Our light comes to us so gradually, we grow little by little, and the increments are so small and scarcely namable, that the sum-total does not surprise us; but if you could see your point of origin and your present point of strength, wealth, influence, comfort, hope, and Christian assurance, without seeing the intermediate process, what miracle could exceed the miracle of your own development? So, when

we read of the men who went through the Red Sea, we can say, each for himself, "So have I." We have fled from Egypt, and have been pursued by the enemy, and have passed through seas as upon dry land. If we had come to the story from without, entirely without sympathy or personal consciousness of divine realities, we should have called it miracle, romance, incredible, fable; but coming to it after forty years' experience, struggle, difficulty, pain, hardship, loss, joy, and all the wondrous contradictions which crowd themselves into human life, we read about the Red Sea as if the story were part of our own life. We must try to outgrow the miracles, and, by our own daily growth in grace, so tower above them as to make them commonplaces. When we read of being fed in the wilderness, a strange glow of fire warms the heart, for we say, "Surely the man has known me; surely he has read my heart. Why, this is my own course." When he says, "There is a certain tree the branches whereof will sweeten the bitter waters," we say, "I know it. I have taken off the branches. I have sweetened the bitter stream, and that tree has been to me a tree of life." We must not read the Bible as if it were something that had nothing to do with our life; we must come from our life back to the Redeemer of it; then, by instinctive gratitude, by an inborn music of the soul, our emphasis will fall into right pressure, and the colour of our reading will be beautiful as God's rainbows, and our whole utterance of the word will be natural because we have lived it, and in reading the Bible we are telling our own story.

Providence leads up to redemption. There is no escape along that line. The God that numbers the hairs of our heads must be proportionately interested in the salvation of our souls. You cannot cut off the divine ministry, saying it belongs to this side of life but not to that. If God care for oxen, there is nothing in all human imagery of speech that can represent his love of man. If you admit the numbering of the hairs of your head, you are bound to go on to the completion of the evidence. Redemption involves providence; providence suggests redemption. Any one intervention of the divine finger in human life means, rightly read, the Cross. To think that God has provided for everything but for the forgiveness of sins, that God has been gracious to

the body and forgotten the soul, that God has provided us with bread for the passing hunger of the days and made no provision for the inward hunger, the famine that kills the soul—who can believe it? It is inadmissible in reasoning, not to say inadmissible in theology.

So, then, we stand in this faith to-day. We do not inherit our religion; we personally receive it, and personally repronounce the faith. Thousands of years ago, men said, "His mercy endureth for ever;" to-day men say the same. And they do not read it out of a book; it is forced out of them by the gracious necessities of gratitude. We are not to be snubbed by men who have invented some new theory of life for which no man ever died, and which never cost any man the sacrifice of a night's sleep. We hide ourselves in the tabernacle of history, and we enter into that tabernacle through the gateway of our own consciousness and experience. We are part of a great band of witnesses; no merely single voice is heard in this testimony; it is a grand, massive, choral utterance of all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues, that God reigneth; that all that transpires in his universe is under his eye, and with him are the resources of wisdom and strength. So, whether we remain here or go elsewhere, the bounds of our habitation are fixed; we do not urge providence, or seek to drive it; we say to thee, ever-looking, ever-loving Father, "As thou wilt, here or there, or yonder, only fix the place, and we will build the altar."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we want to trust thee ; give us thy Holy Spirit that we may not fail in the exercise of faith. We are made happy by trust ; we are sure that our lives are in the hands of God, and that all things, how contrary soever in appearance and momentary conflict, work together for good, if we be right within. It is this inward part of our nature that is our difficulty. We can dress the body, but how can we perfect the soul ? It is not in man that liveth to direct his way or to handle the education of his own spirit ; we must come to our Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and cry mightily unto our Father, saying, Create in me a clean heart, and renew within me a right spirit. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; it tells lies to itself ; it is self-deceiving, self-mocking, therefore self-ruining : Lord, save us from ourselves. Out of the heart proceed all evil things : create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. When we would do good, evil is present with us ; whilst we pray, we doubt ; whilst our eyes are lifted up to the hills whence cometh our help, they turn aside that they may glance at the valleys, the temptations, the prizes of time. How wondrously hast thou made us, and how wondrously have we made ourselves ! We have lost our Father, we are in the darkness, we are meditating mischief all the day : create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Assure us that the enemy is not dead, that he has but left us for a season, and will return stronger than ever. When the enemy would come in like a flood, lift up thy Spirit as a standard against him. Feed us with the bread of life : Lord, evermore give us this bread ; then we shall be stronger than all that can be arrayed against us. Watch our spirit, regard our heart with special interest, take not thy Holy Spirit from us. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew within me a right spirit. Amen.

Psalm xlv.

[NOTE.—This is a psalm for a special occasion, that occasion being none other than the nuptials of an anointed king. The king is described as beautiful and gracious and blessed for evermore, and as a conqueror whose objects are not dominion and glory, but truth, humility, and righteousness ; he is even described as a divine person, worthy of the name of God ; he is seated on an everlasting throne, anointed with the oil of gladness, and received with the strains of harps in ivory palaces. The bride is a king's daughter, one of a foreign race, beautiful and glorious ; her attendants are pure virgins, her children are to be princes in all the earth. As to the particular king referred to, some have suggested Ahab, others Jehoram ; but the

suggestion scarcely needs refutation. The only satisfactory interpretation of all the terms of the psalm is to be found in its Messianic character. The daughter of the king is the Church, the attendants of the bride represent foreign nations brought into willing submission to the Messiah. The psalm is inscribed "To the chief musician upon Shoshannim," the meaning of which word is *lilies*. This may be the name of the tune to which the psalm was recited; or the word may be metaphorical, equivalent to lily-like maidens or bridesmaids; and the meaning may be, a psalm to be recited to a melody adapted to a bridal solemnity. It has been pointed out that a certain sacredness attached to the lily; for example, there was lily-work on the capitals of the pillars, Jachin and Boaz, and on the brim of the molten sea (1 Kings vii. 19, 22, 26).]

THE KING'S DAUGHTER.

"The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold" (ver. 13).

THE Psalmist says, "My heart is inditing a good matter." We should think that he was dictating something to a writer. That is not the meaning of the word. Literally, My heart is bubbling all over with a song of loves. Not a song of love even, but genuine Hebrew,—a song of loves. Different languages have established their own rights: there is an independence as well as a unity of human language. What would be bad syntax in one language is excellent grammar in another. The Hebrew will pluralise in its own way, and make grammar. My heart is springing up,—my heart is like a well, a spring, a fountain, rising, shooting high into the blue sky, and I must tell you what I think and feel about the king's daughter. It is an advantage to listen to a man when he is in his best mood. This man has no fault to find with the mood in which he is about to sing; he feels at his very best. We know what it is to be dejected and in fear and in weakness, and to be unable to find words to express our uppermost thought; and we also know what it is to have great liberty of speech, as if we knew all words, and could make more, and could talk on with rising eloquence, until we had spoken out all that we felt of love and hope and life.

Let us take it that the man is talking about the Church and kingdom of Christ. The Psalmists did not always know the subjects of their own song. There is an unconsciousness that

touches the sublimest genius. It is sometimes when we do not know what we are doing that we are doing most. Men think we are insane, because they are in cold blood, and we are filled with the very fire and life of Heaven. The prophets did not know what they were prophesying; their words were as strange to themselves as to those who listened to them; they wondered what manner of Man and time was signified, as the Holy Spirit wrought within them the mystery of the evangelical forecast; they wondered what was meant by the sufferings of Christ and by the glory that should follow. Probably the poet did not know that he was in reality talking about an ideal daughter, the Church, redeemed, washed with the precious blood of Christ, made without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—what the apostle calls a “glorious church,” gleaming, burning, effulging at every point; a mystery to herself; not conscious of her own beauty, yet often wondering that the world should stop in fascination to express wonder and to render homage.

Here are two aspects of the king's daughter—the internal and the external; within all glorious, without covered with wrought gold,—a magnificent congruity, a spiritual miracle of consistency. “Glorious,” not commonplace; separated from every other institution or mode of life by a dazzling, gleaming brightness above the shining of the sun. The Church is not a club, meeting at regular times, bound by certain agreed stipulations, living a decent, ordinary, enjoyable life: the Church is a miracle, or she is nothing; the Church is glorious, or she has no right to exist. Not that the Church has already upon the earth realised all her highest possible glory, but she is living in that direction; so that no sun-ray shall be lost upon her, she shall catch all the descending beams and hold them as an increase of her own brightness. Because the Church has lost its distinctiveness it has lost its power. The Master of the Church continually walks up and down, saying, “What do ye more than others?” because it is in the “more than others” that our Christianity begins. We have not begun to be Christians whilst we are simply as good as other people, whilst we are only baptised pagans, whilst we are living upon the husks of moral maxims. We may be regarded as amiable and useful and kindly and neighbourly, but that is not

Christianity, that has no relation to Christianity, that is often foisted upon society as a simulation of Christianity. Christianity is in its uniqueness, in its doing things that nobody else ever thought of doing, in its insanity, its holy, beneficent madness. Some men are not Christians, they are only professors of Christianity.

“All glorious,”—not one shadow, not one indication of love of darkness. There is no adulteration in this glory; wherever a beam of light is present, or wherever a beam of light can issue forth, that beam of light is visible. “All glorious” in doctrine, in conduct, in speech, in thought, in the innermost recesses of the heart—“all glorious within.” There the glory cannot be seen by outward observers,—an internal, spiritual glory. How neglectful some persons are of out-of-the-way places, of matters which do not come under public criticism! How anxious to be right externally, and how indolent about spiritual cleanliness and beauty, not to say glory! What a love of applause! what a spirit of ostentation! what a decoration for the passing moment! The peculiarity of the king’s daughter was that she was good all through and through; glorious where she could least be seen,—glorious in her spirit, in her motive, in the whole conception of life; just as glorious as if there were not one human eye to look upon her brightness. We are so prone to do much that other people may look upon; we wonder what they will think of us. Many expenses are incurred to please critics who mayhap may never bestow a thought upon us. It is our public attitude, our social relation, our neighbourly environment, that we think about. Under certain limitations such solicitude is right; but it is worse than a mistake, if it be put in substitution for spiritual, internal, invisible beauty and brightness. Probably the poet only meant that the innermost chamber of the bride was a beautiful room; his thought may not have risen above that comparatively mean conception: but the higher thought, translated into the idealism of the Church, is that the Church of the living Christ is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, a glorious Church—glorious within.

Why? Because of a conscious realisation of the divine

presence. Have we made our preparation for the Chief of Guests? Has the housewife made no arrangement to receive her visitor with becoming care and distinction? Will any place do for one whose head is illuminated with divine light, whose heart is filled with the love of Calvary, whose presence is an indication of an ineffable and immortal kingliness? The king's daughter will receive the King in a prepared chamber; she will say, This habitation must be made worthy of him; he himself is glorious, and such glory as I can supply must be furnished against the time of his coming. So, who would receive God into an unprepared heart? We must make the heart-house as worthy as we can of the King's coming. This we can do—we can pray God the Holy Ghost to make us what we ought to be, to take possession of our heart, to cleanse it, purify it, elevate its every impulse, and consecrate it as the guest-chamber in which God himself shall abide with us. Consciousness of the divine presence implies conscious communion with God; taking ourselves up to our highest estate; sharing the very thought and passion of divine love,—a marvellous transfiguration of our lower selves into our ideality. Mystery of mysteries is this, that the mortal can talk with the Eternal; that the creature can commune with the Creator; that a life so low that presently it will be cut down and burned like grass in the oven can go right up to eternal Kingliness and say, Let us commune together, concerning the mystery of being and the mystery of destiny, the mystery of conduct and the mystery of service: O Eternal King, let me, poor, poor me, talk with thee a long time! Out of this must come a growing solicitude to be transformed into the divine likeness. When we can see God we can be satisfied with no other beauty; all other beauty then sinks into its right relation, and becomes but a dim type or emblem of the ineffable loveliness; having seen God, we can bear the sight of nothing lower, except that which is of kindred quality, and that which we can help to the level to which the Holy Spirit has exalted our own souls. Given the conscious divine presence, conscious communion with God, conscious desire to be transformed into his likeness, and you have given, if not noontide, yet heavenly dawn; such consciousness shall grow like the advancing sun, until it has reached the zenith of its power and splendour.

What is the king's daughter without ? Look at her clothing, that will answer the inquiry,—“Her clothing is of wrought gold.” The internal glory is proved by the external beauty. There is a clothing which we are called upon to admire,—the clothing of the king's daughter is of wrought gold : no dress can be too beautiful, if it express a beautiful character. You cannot be too lovely in your costume (assuming that you can afford it) if the costume proclaim the man. Say frankly, is there any irony so palpable and detestable as that represented by an expensively dressed fool ? There is an incongruity which amounts to wickedness. Some persons are nothing but clothes. A man has no right to make himself a palpable self-contradiction,—he is a whited sepulchre. No bad man has a right to wear a good coat,—he is a liar. No bad man has a right to put a flower in his button-hole,—he spoils the flower, he dishonours the summer, he is a living, and ought to be an instructive, paradox. If you see a flower in the garment of a bad man you should cry, “Stop thief !” Do not imagine that flowers have no feeling, that nature would just as soon decorate a fool as a philosopher. Nature is God's ; nature bears a divine stamp and seal ; nature is but an emblem, and if the emblem be upon the wrong person what mischief may ensue ! Who can calculate the effect of a paradox so palpable and so mischievous ?

In the case of the king's daughter we have a beautiful congruity. Because she is all glorious within, she has a right to a covering of wrought gold. It would be wrought gold, even if the goldsmith had never touched it. She might be in poverty, yet her poverty would be as an image of wrought gold. We are not to be too literal in our construction of these sentences,—there is a transfiguring process of soul upon cloth, if you will have it so ; there is a possibility that a carpenter's raiment may become white and glistening. The internal light illumines the external robe. The wise soul has a wise face. The foolish observer may not see it, because he judges by false or transient canons ; but there never yet was a wise man that had not a wise countenance, a great man that had not somehow a great face. There never was a good man that did not vindicate his goodness externally, in some way, in some measure ; not always instantaneously,

but people have said concerning a good man, "The longer you know him the more you love him ; he may not be very taking at first, but, oh, what he is to rest upon ! He is slow of speech, but having given his word he has given his soul." So if the king's daughter had been from a worldly point of view poor, yet there is a grace of poverty when it is associated with internal pureness, and large wisdom, and burning aspiration after God and God's eternity. Here is a man who has been a long time in prayer, he comes down the hill as morning might come down the quickly illuminated mountain ; speak to the man, and he wists not that his face doth shine. It is not a painted splendour, it is not a decoration brought from some remote market of the world ; it is a shining that comes from within, because the man has been enjoying that consciousness of the divine presence, and that consciousness of divine communion, of which we have just spoken. This is the beauty of heaven ; this is not formal beauty ; this is the light that springeth from within, which will be as beauteous in the morning as it is at night, in the winter as in the summer : how trying soever the circumstances through which the man may pass, he will throw a sacred radiance upon his whole condition, and make a space for himself by the power of wisdom.

The costliest environment is balanced by the character, and brought into harmony by the soul. Sometimes we are conscious of incongruity as between the man and his own estate. We wonder whether this estate has been come by honestly ; it is bigger than the owner, it overwhelms him, it is his one subject ; he is always surveying his own land and making a new map of his own estate. We say, Who is this man ? and how came he to have all these tens of thousands of acres, and all these various palaces ?—one in the mountains, one at the seaside, one in the metropolis, one far away which he calls his hunting-place, with a garden miles long of heather that is ashamed of its owner. This is palpable and shocking incongruity. Sometimes we have seen a man surrounded by estates, and have felt that the man was greater than the property ; we have said, What a soul this man has ! Listen to his thoughts, hear his conversation ; presently he will rise into prayer, or utter himself in sacred song, or speak

lovingly and redeemingly about the poor and those who have no helper; and then the environment falls away into its right perspective, and we say, Would God this man owned the whole world! for then the poor would be made to rejoice, and the sad of heart would know what a friend they had. If there is any disparity it should be on the spiritual side, so that we shall say concerning a man, however much he has, he ought to have more; he is a faithful steward, a generous administrator: appoint him the guardian of society. In the costume as described by the poet we have no contradiction, no irony, no sense of incongruity; we have a massive, simple, beautiful, beneficent consistency. Think of a man who has plenty of clothes and no ideas, a well dressed body and a naked soul! Pity him. Think of a man who has a large wardrobe, and no library, no course of reading, no education at home! Another wardrobe! he says; never Another book! That is the man to describe as poor. Think of a man who has a glutton's appetite and a miser's soul!

What is the miracle that Jesus Christ wants to work? It is the miracle of congruity, the miracle of harmony, the miracle of music; it is to make us internally right that he may make us externally beautiful and noble. He will not begin at the external point; he does not care about our manners, he cares about our souls: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew within me a right spirit!" Then the hand shall be clean, and the physical form itself shall bear evidence that even we carry the stamp of the divine substance.

PRAYER.

LORD, increase our faith. Faith is the gift of God ; Lord, give unto us such faith as overcomes the world. We would live the faith-life, that uppermost, divinest life, that trusts all to God, that has no selfish will, that gains its life by losing it. Gladly would we enter into the mystery of this process. Whoso would gain his life shall lose it, and whoso would lose his life for Christ's sake shall find it. We would get by giving, we would grow by serving, we would become refined by the loss which is created by suffering. Thou hast made us in thine own image, but we have covered up thy personality with immeasurable deceit. Lord, cause us to sustain a great loss, to shed all that we have done ourselves, until thine own presence shines forth within us, and we become as those who have been transformed. Show us that man can hold nothing in his hands. Canst thou deliver us from this great fallacy, that we can really heap up unto ourselves anything and assure it? Lord, if thou canst work this miracle of faith in us, we would say, Let this be the accepted time, and the day of salvation ; we would be rid of all this care, anxiety, and foolish solicitude, and would fall into God's hands, assured that all things work together for good in reply to human love. Thou didst never disappoint the earnest heart ; the soul that burned for thee was always gratified by a revelation of thy presence : Lord, increase our faith. We would be rid of these senses which deceive us and mock us every day, and make fools of us seven times a week ; and we would live in the soul, in the spirit, in the upper nature, dwelling and walking and living with God. This desire is created in us by the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the very gift of the Cross of Christ. Once we had no such desire, the world was enough, and time sufficient, and what our own hands could do was more than enough ; but now we see how little all things are, how great is the future, how immeasurable is heaven, how transcendent and precious is love. Thou art taking us through the valleys of life : we are weary of the long walk ; give us strength that we may finish the mile or two yet remaining, without impious reproach or fault-finding with God. But the way is long, and the lights are uncertain, the misery is positive, and the occasional enjoyment is never enough. Yet the valleys are of thy making, time is thy road into eternity ; we would accept thy dispensations, and murmur not. If thou canst find any joy for us in this place of graves, and in this air loud with lamentation, good Lord, neglect us not in the time of our best desires. Show us that we know nothing, yet show us that the veil which keeps us from perfect knowledge is very thin and may in one moment be dissolved, and we may be face to face with God. In this high expectancy keep our souls, then we shall have no time for folly, no taste

for wickedness, and no relish for the things that do not minister to the soul's life. The Lord expel all evil by the incoming of all good; and because of the presence of burning and purifying love may all things unholy be banished or consumed. Thou hast given us a long schooling,—in the cradle, in helpless infancy, in the school where everything was difficult, in the house where will clashed with will, and the heart was often stung with disappointment; thou hast also trained us in the market-place, where man is endeavouring to outwit his fellow day by day, and boasting himself when he has accomplished his nefarious purpose. All this is hard upon us, the devil is always against the soul, and those that would help the spirit are often in such cloudy distances that we cannot realise their ministry. Yet it is all well; the prophets said so, and the apostles; our fathers and mothers taught us so when we knew little or nothing of life; now this thing is wrought into our very thought, so that we constantly say, It will be well in the latter end, though the beginning was cloudy and the beginning was small. Lord, help every man to do his day's work well, to carry his load as if the Lord himself had just put the burden upon the weakening back; and give every one courage to say, Judge not yet, nor to-morrow, but on the third day behold the revelation of God. We thank thee for all that helps us, for everything that gives us even momentary delight; for the household hearth, the warm hospitable fire: we bless thee for any inch of garden we have, enough to hold one flower, which is the beginning and the pledge of paradise. For all musical voices, and tender ministries, and friendships that heal us when our hearts are sore, for all the thousand elements that point towards reconstruction and immortality, we bless thee as for so many angels. Pity us for our lost estate; thou who hast made the day hast also made the night; thou knowest the tragedy of darkness, thou knowest the powers of evil, there is no fire in perdition that thou hast not known, and there is no temptation in the air rending it and tearing it with cruel force which thou hast not measured, and which thy Son our Saviour has not undergone. Help us to escape the little, the narrow, the mean, and the foolish, and to live in the infinite and the eternal. We pray at the Cross, because there it is good to pray,—there is the angel of purity, there is the angel of pardon, there is the angel that keeps the gate of heaven. Amen.

Psalm l.

RELIGION NOTHING WITHOUT MORALITY.

THIS is a psalm of Asaph. This is the first psalm of Asaph found in this section of the Psalter. Every man must speak in his own natural style, and the style of this leader of choir, who was also a poet, is a style of supreme loftiness and majesty, which would not become the narrower capacity, the lower intellect, of meaner men. We must join him where we can in this song of thunder. He will affright us, as majesty affrights some visions; yet he will take care that before the

thunderstorm ceases there shall be something we can gaze upon with delight, and listen to with spiritual gratification and profit. We should not always be talking about God as little children talk. It is sweet now and again to listen to a speech that has nothing in it but words of one syllable; that speech is called simple, intelligible, and useful: without doubting that criticism, we must always in our religious conceptions make room for vastness, majesty, and ineffable glory. The God that made the little glowworm also built the heavens with stars and constellations. Both views of God are right. Neither is complete without the other. Without simplicity we should have no real intelligence, and without grandeur we should not touch the highest moods and points of reverence. Asaph was nothing if not magnificent. He now pictures God under three names as coming forth to judge the earth. The divine presence shines "out of Zion," which is called "the perfection of beauty." It is not the divine person, but the divine presence, that shines. Many have seen the presence of God who have never seen his person. We are to make a great distinction between personality and presence. Personality means figure, visible attitude, form that can be in some measure described; but presence may be influence, inspiration, and enlargement and purification of religious consciousness; so that a man shall say, Lo, God is here, and I knew it not. The knowledge of God without a vision of his personality is all that is permitted to us in these initial schools of time.

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him" (ver. 3). When he came to give the law, he brought all the lightning with him; and when he comes to see what has become of the law, he brings that same lightning back again. Wherever you have to deal with law you have to deal with lightning. Lightning has no mercy; lightning has no sentiment; lightning is no poet, though it writes nothing but poetry. When the Lord came to Sinai to give the law, he burned and thundered; when he comes now to judge the earth, he comes in fire and tempest, and manifold yet musical uproar. This is the consistency of the divine movement, this is the wondrous harmony of the action which we call law. We shall be able by these phenomena

to identify God, and to say with sureness of conviction, Yea, this is he who came to Sinai,—we remember that very lightning; we heard that very thunder; these are the smokings that rose up before us like an infinite cloud; this is the feeling of weirdness which made us say to Moses, Oh, do not let God speak to us himself any more, but speak thou to us in his name. We shall know the heavenly signs when they reappear.

Who will God have for witnesses? Suppose he shall make an accusation, and shall not be able to establish it by proof, what then? Asaph provides against that contingency:—"He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people" (ver. 4). That is to say, he will empanel all heaven and all earth as a jury, and they shall decide what his course of providence has been. The blue sky shall speak for God, the green earth shall not hold its tongue when God's judgments are being criticised by men; the heaven and the earth will speak up for him, and will say, He nourished us, he never neglected us, to us his goodness was daily and continual, and we have no reason to complain of the divine administration. The stars will say so, and all the systems and constellations, and the whole stellar pomp of the invisible and immeasurable universe, shall come down to say, God is good. And the earth, with meaner voice, but testimony equally clear, shall say, He never neglected me, he sent his sunshine and his rain, his dew and his living air, and all the ministries of heaven seemed to nourish and comfort me, and I rolled on through my springs and summers, and autumns and winters, conscious that God himself was swinging me like a censer round the sun. Nature will not be dumb when God judges the earth.

"Gather my saints together unto me"—my pious ones, my separated ones; not only the good, but those that are not so good; the good *minus*, the sincere but mistaken souls: let all come together that started with me in covenant. "Saints" is a sweet word; it ought to mean holy ones; it ought to signify hearts that are sanctified, purified, refined; souls in which there is no speck of evil. It will mean that some day. Words have yet to come to the fruition of their significance. We must use the

words now, but they are oftentimes empty vessels, or vessels not half filled ; but the time will come when they will contain all their meaning, and will vindicate their right to have been in human language. At present we do not use half our own dictionary words. The lexicon of every nation is at least twice too large for merely daily use. Learned men want some of the words, experts require other terms, but the common people use probably one-tenth of all the language of their nation. But the time will come when every word will be wanted as a vessel into which God will pour meaning, and this word "saints" must stand until that time. There is little in it now, but its whole capacity will be filled up when God comes to realise his own purpose in human creation and progress.

Now the Lord calls before him two sets of people,—first, the sincere but mistaken souls that keep on grinding eternally and doing nothing. They live in all ages,—the ceremonialists, the ritualists ; the people who begin at a certain hour and go on until a certain hour, and never cease, and never seem to tire : and yet they move without removing ; they are in continual action, but they never make any progress. "Hear, O my people, and I will speak. . . . I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me" (vers. 7, 8). The meaning is : I have nothing to say against what you have done in the matter of sacrifices and burnt-offerings ; you have been most punctual. The word used here in English is "continually," literally, daily : not a single day had been omitted or neglected by these poor mistaken souls. They were mere grinders, simple slaves, repeaters of customs ; not entering into the meaning, spirit, thought, poetry of the action ; always doing something and not knowing why they were doing it. That sentence would seem to be the history of a good deal of modern piety. Understand what the Lord says to these simple, dreary, mistaken ceremony-finders ; in effect, he says, Now hear me : I am not going to tell you that your sacrifices have been too few, or that your burnt-offerings have been neglected ; you have been punctual, regular, daily in your service of the altar : but the spirit of your work you have never seen for a moment ; you serve God with the hand ; and you think that is enough.

Now comes a statement which may be easily mistaken :—

“I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains : and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee : for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats ?” (vers. 9–13).

Yet this very same Lord did, according to chapter and verse, fix himself every sacrifice and every oblation, and now he would seem to talk as if these were human inventions, and as if his nostrils were offended by the unsavoury odour of the shambles of the Church. That is our English ignorance ; we do not understand intimately the language in which this declaration was made. Very often in the Hebrew tongue things are treated with contempt when the speaker simply means to put them into a subordinate or right relation to some other thing. When God says, “I will not take your bullocks,” he does not mean to say that the offering of bullocks was not according to the Levitical ritual ; he means to say, I will not take them *alone* ; I must have them, but unless they are given in the right atmosphere and with the right thought and with the right motive, I will have nothing to do with them. No bullock can satisfy the desire, the infinite solicitude of the divine heart. So there are those who tell us that God always seems to reject blood, and reject sanguinary sacrifices of every kind, and they will even quote this text, “Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats ?” and other texts of kindred import, in which the Lord would seem to disown his own ritual, and to put away from him the very things the Church had appointed. There is no such meaning in the text ; the simple significance is this,—Put things in their right places ; understand that when I ask you to sacrifice a bullock to me, it is not the bullock I want, but that which is signified by the oblation, and if that be wanting the bullock is a vain offering. There is no enlargement of the religious consciousness in these statements. The Jew was always a Jew, and never grew to be anything else ; he kept to his bullock slain, and to his offering of goats and sheep and pigeons and doves ; but he lost the spirit of the ritual, and having lost the spirit, the ritual itself became a dead letter, an empty and unacceptable tribute. That is where we stand

to-day. Have I not been to church? have I not sung the requisite number of hymns? have I not gone through all the stipulated arrangements of ecclesiastical life? have I not been properly attired? have I not been faithful to the ritual? To all these questions we might from a literal point of view give a satisfactory answer, and yet we might be utterly impious and absolutely worse than infidels. That is what the Church has to understand. No man can pride himself upon his ecclesiastical diary, referring to it day by day, and saying, I was punctual at church; notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, there I was; I performed every function, I subscribed to every charity; I have been most regular and most conscientious in all these matters. Probably so; and yet the Lord says, Take them all away! I did not want you at church on a wet day; I did not accept your presence, even considering the inclement weather; you did not bring your soul to the work, and therefore all that is external, functional, and arbitrary must go for nothing, though it is good in itself, but it becomes worthless when the spirit is withdrawn from it, when the music of love is no longer heard in the language of eulogium. So we are all destroyed together; not only the Jews but the Gentiles go down in this thunderstorm. We are often at church when we do not want to be there; we often do things of a religious kind simply because somebody else will know if we did not perform the duty: if we really and truly had our own way we would do things very differently, and we only obey the genius of custom, or pay the tribute of public decency and method; in our souls we would rather be in a place of amusement than in a place of religious observance. Then the Lord says, Do I want your church-going? do I accept your hymn-singing? am I a lover of your psalms? Not that he is condemning these things in themselves, they are right and they are necessary; but if they be offered as so much external tribute divested of music and piety, spiritual refinement and religious reality, then the Lord pours his contempt upon the silver vessels of his own altar. Who are these people to whom the Lord is now speaking? Perfectly mistaken souls; persons who mistake routine for real service; persons who suppose that you can keep a clock right by moving the hands. These people flood the world. It is next to impossible to drive out of a man's

head the fallacy that he can keep a clock right simply by moving the fingers,—you cannot get him into the inside of the machine ; no, he will put on the clock, he will put it back, he will manipulate the face, instead of attending to the internal machinery. Nobody could be more regular than these poor souls. They did every part of their duty, and yet never did any part of it. This is the contradiction of the moral nature, that a thing shall be done, yet not done ; a thing shall be continued, completed, and finished, and yet never started at all. How so ? Thus : God does not want the bullock any more than he wants the modern psalm ; he wants the heart represented by either of them, according to the dispensation under which we live.

Therefore he says (ver. 14), “Offer unto God thanksgiving.” How much is this expression mistaken !—as who shall say, God wants none of your ritualism, be it even simple church-going or simple psalm-singing ; God wants to have nothing whatever to do with that : he wants moral sacrifice, moral obedience ; and as for all your so-called functions and duties, they are worthless. That is not the reading of the Psalms, that is not the reading of the law of God, that is not a proper construction of the spirit and gospel of Christ. A man may keep the Sabbath, and yet not keep it ; then the Lord says, Your Sabbaths are a burden to me, and an offence. Men therefore quote such passages, and say, See how the Lord regards Sabbaths and feasts and new moons and appointed fastings or banquetings ; he says, Away with them ! Yes, he does, and yet in your sense he does not, would be my reply : he likes any man who keeps the new moon or the new feast or the appointed fast, and he says, Good soul, I accept what you are doing, though it be all superstitious, because you not only do this, but you live accordingly ; you say, Even this superstitious rite has a high meaning, and my soul must express in its sweetness and charity, in its love of pureness, what these things symbolically imply. If a child should pluck a handful of flowers, and bring them to God’s altar and say, These are thine ; may I lay them here ? God will say, Yes, if thou wilt live the flower-life, if thou wilt root thyself in God, if thou wilt take upon thee all the beauty of his sunshine, if thou wilt emit all the fragrance of his presence and action in the soul ; if not, take away

these flowers. Does God then condemn the flowers? No; he condemns their misuse: the bullock is right, the psalm-singing is right, yet they are both wrong if the soul is wrong. Such construction of the divine language enables us to retain all holy ritual, especially retain the ineffably blessed Cross of Christ in all the significance of its agony and blood,—because we rise by the action of the Holy Ghost to a proper conception of the meaning of that priestly emblem.

Then the Lord, even in the lips and visions of Asaph, doubly poet, becomes condescending, gentle, and kind, saying, “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” Literally, My glory is in thy salvation; when I glorify myself, it is by saving thy people. The Lord is not glorified by having infinite tribute paid to him because he is majestic; he is glorified when we say to him, Lord, I was little, and thou didst make me great; I was lost, and thou didst find me; I was a poor blind wanderer in the wilderness, and thou didst come after me and save me; and this I will tell to all the world, saying, Come, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. Thus is God glorified; not in being offered the bouquets of his universe, but by living so as to show men that all we are and have that is holy and good is from the Lord.

How sweet is the blue after the great thunderstorm! Oh, how it trembles! how it vibrates! how it is almost a kind of worldless music! all the welcomer because of the uproar through which we have just passed: “Call upon me in the day of trouble.” Thy cloud is only a mile high, but God’s heaven is infinite in altitude. “I will deliver thee”—thee, the single, the little, the one, the only, insignificant according to the world’s reckoning. “And thou shalt” by thy deliverance “glorify me,” for there will be another soul to say, I was lost and am found.

Then the tone changes. In verse 16 the Lord is full of anger: he repels the wicked. Up to this point he has been speaking to the mistaken; now he turns upon the wicked, and all heaven is dark as manifold midnight:—“Unto the wicked God saith——” and then comes such a storm of interrogation and rebuke and

repudiation as to constitute a noble commentary on the character of God. This charge is principally notable as showing how character deteriorates. He is speaking to priests who are cloaked hypocrites. He says, "When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him," saying, If you will steal and divide the profit with me not a word shall be said about the process ; there is room enough under my cloak to cover you. "Thou givest thy mouth to evil," literally, Thou allowest the devil to borrow thy mouth, so that the devil shall come behind thy lips and talk out all his lies and blasphemy, as under a priestly personality and guise. "Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother ; thou slanderest thine own mother's son." Thus a man cannot be wrong with God and right with his own brother. A man cannot forget to pray, and yet be just to his own son. A man cannot live a bad life, and leave an equitable will. He may think it is equitable, he may satisfy his own depraved conscience about it ; but you cannot be wrong religiously and right humanly. Your own wills will testify against you ; and as for speech, you would as soon speak against your own flesh and blood as speak about the veriest stranger on the face of the earth. All sacred relations go down when the piety of the soul towards God becomes corrupt. "Thou slanderest,"—in Arabic, Thou givest a thrust. Its corresponding or equivalent word is in the Greek "scandal," both words meaning that which causes a man to stumble or to fall. A scandal is a falling. Here you have the very priests of God causing their own flesh and blood to fall ; here you have men that saw them pray, setting something before an unsuspecting fellow-man that he may in the darkness tumble over it, and then they will run to help him, or probably run away to tell what a scandal has been created in the Church. These men first make the scandals, and then report them ; first thrust at their brother, and then tell others that he has fallen, apostatised, and divested himself of every claim to confidence or consideration. The charge goes further. God forbore ; he did not strike the fools with lightning at once ; and they misconstrued his very patience. They said, God is approving our policy ; not one gleam of lightning have I seen, not one growl of thunder have I heard, as if God were in anger or in trouble : God is looking on with approbation,—“Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as

thyself." Now when he comes to judgment, he says, "Consider, lest I tear you in pieces." Do not misconstrue God's providence; do not say, The bad man prospers, therefore God is bad; do not say that, because an evil policy has succeeded, therefore providence has stamped it with the seal of approbation; the voice thundering along the heavens and through all the corridors of history is this: I have forborne, I have had patience; but now consider, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces. He shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel, he shall rend them limb from limb, and there shall be none to deliver. Yet the Lord could not finish his psalm in this tone, so he says he that ordereth his conversation aright he will bless, and he will accept his good behaviour as a tribute to the divine glory. "Conversation" means conduct. The apostle says, "We have our conversation in heaven," literally, We have our citizenship in heaven. The reference is not to speech, for there are men who have a gift of cunning phrase, and could talk piety all the day. This word "conversation" means conduct, discipline, attention to the spirit and expression of life, and he that ordereth his life aright shall see the salvation of God and bring glory to heaven. That is our duty. Now is our opportunity. We are helpless, but God is almighty. On thy power, O Holy Spirit, would we evermore confidently and gratefully rely.

Psalm lxi:

1. Hear my cry O God ; attend unto my prayer.
2. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed : lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
3. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.
4. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever : I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.
5. For thou, O God, hast heard my vows : thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name.
6. Thou wilt prolong the king's life : and his years as many generations.
7. He shall abide before God for ever : O prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him.
8. So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

WORSHIP AND CONFIDENCE.

‘Hear my cry, O God ; attend unto my prayer ’ (ver. 1).

THE Book of Psalms illustrates in a most varied and striking manner the religious side of human life. Setting aside for the moment all theories of inspiration, and indeed ignoring inspiration altogether, we have a book full of the most passionate and reverent utterances addressed to a Being supposed to be worthy of all homage and to be the fountain of all blessing. This we have simply as a matter of fact, and no history of the human mind would be complete which omitted the most explicit notice of this circumstance. It will be observed, too, that the Psalmists and suppliants seldom allow the slightest doubt to mar the purity and wholeness of their worship ; God is present, —close at hand,—brighter than light, clothed with power, girded with majesty ! Sometimes there is familiarity, as of friend talking with friend ; sometimes there is a cry of pain, as if God had turned away his face ; sometimes a moan of contrition, as if penitence were rending the heart ; sometimes a shout of triumph, as if the observer had caught the King's smile. Yet,

throughout the whole, all is intensely religious. In passing from page to page of this book we pass as it were through the aisles of a temple, or through solemn cloisters where men are engaged in prayer.

Let us dwell upon this side of the book as affording the most impressive evidence of the intense Religiousness of the human heart; and in doing so we feel that there is no chasm between the ancient Psalmists and ourselves. Their words, stripped of all local references, might have been our own; they express the common passions of the heart; they set to music the most elevated feelings of the world. The very first words of this psalm have often been wrung from our own spirits; in the troubled night, in the doubtful day, in affliction, in disappointment, and sometimes even in joy, we too have said, "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer." Any other words would not have been equal to the feeling of the moment; they would have been cold, narrow, barren,—unworthy of the soul's paroxysm or ecstasy. In the highest spiritual moods we realise our kinship with the whole world. We know all men when we kneel in worship; the Mohammedan is no longer a stranger to us, nor are men who use gestures and expressions which we cannot adopt. Centrally, we are one; the Great Interpreter, to whom all languages are but variations of one speech, knows what the heart is saying, and sees in worship what can be seen in no other exercise of the soul,—sees the unity and moral identity of all men. In the first verse of this psalm it is not the Jew, but the man, that speaks. The same idea can be found in all languages. When David speaks thus, he speaks for the whole world.

There is no doubt the most intense Personality in the petition; it is *my* cry, it is *my* prayer. What then? Even when the man individualises himself most carefully, he does but mingle most familiarly with all other men. Picture the scene; see David separating himself from the companionship of his most trusted friends, seeking out the most obscure retirement, kneeling alone in some deeply shadowed forest or in the cleft of a far-off rock; yet the moment he says, "Hear my cry, O God," he gives

expression to the sigh of the universal heart. But we cannot be indifferent to the pathetic aspect of this petition. Though all men pray, yet each man has his own prayer. The heart has its own way of telling its own tale, and cannot be satisfied with paraphrase or generalisation. With minuteness which cuts it as a sharp instrument, the heart must tell all its sins, and set forth in order its troubles, its plagues, and its high desires; with brokenness of speech, which is often the most perfect of eloquence, it must recite the number of its failures, and tell of all its groping and stumbling along the path of life. No man will it accept as a hired advocate; no voice could do it justice; it must utter *my* cry, and *my* prayer, and where it cannot find words it will heave the sigh or the groan which asks God to be his own interpreter. We may have great helps in prayer, the spirit may accept the choicely wise and tender words of other men; yet there is a point at which the heart breaks away to hold secret intercourse with the Father and Saviour of men.

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (ver. 2).

This is the voice of an exile,—a man far from the city which he loves most; yet even at the extremity of the land he says he will cry unto God. Why not? God can give the exile a home! Wherever God reveals himself in loving pity and all the riches of his grace, the soul may take its rest, knowing that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon. David cried from the end of the land! We have cried from the same extremity. By processes too subtle for us to comprehend, God has often caused our misfortunes to become our blessings. While we stood at the centre our souls were unsteady; but when we were driven to the outside, far away to some bleak place where the cutting winds struck us, and the stranger made us a gazing-stock and a reproach, we turned towards the holy hill and desired to be led to the high rock. Who can say how much of our wealth we owe to our poverty? Who can tell how trouble has been the minister of God, sent to show us the way to great joy? David said that his heart was overwhelmed,—what a strong expression! Great floods had broken upon it; strong tempests had poured their fury upon

his spirit ; night and day the storm had laid siege to his heart ; for long weeks he had been unable to make himself heard through the roar of the assault, and when there was a lull in the wind, he said "my heart is overwhelmed." Does sorrow estrange him from us, so that we cannot understand his speech ? Is the word "overwhelmed" not in our vocabulary ? We know few words better ! We have often seen the ominous cloud gather ; it has spread into a great blackness ; a few drops have been suddenly lashed against the panes, and then with terrific violence the floods have come, shower on shower, river on river, wild winds whirling the seas with terrific force against our dwelling-place until our home was ruined, our pride broken down, and the last joy savagely engulfed. Oh, the roar ; the cold, pitiless, hollow roar ! There was a sound of mockery in it, and a sound of doom ; it was a voice without speech, a desolation more desolate than death. No man of overwhelmed heart is a stranger to us. Tears talk all languages. David would be at home with us to-day !

In the midst of the Psalmist's trouble there rises an aspiration,—"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." The self-helplessness expressed in this prayer moves our entire sympathy. "Lead me,"—what a blind man who had wandered from the accustomed path would say ; "lead me,"—what a lame man would say who had fallen by reason of his great weakness ; "lead me,"—what a terrified man would say who had to pass along the edge of a bottomless abyss. It is in such extremities that men best know themselves. Before the floods they account themselves as gods, but afterwards they feel themselves to be but men. David wished to be led to the rock ; he wished to stand firmly, to stand above the flood-line, to have rest after so great disquietude. Then there is a rock, is there, a rock higher than we ? We have heard of Jesus Christ by this strange name ; we have heard of him as the Rock of ages ; we have heard of him as the Rock in the wilderness ; we have heard of him as the Stone rejected of the builders but elected of God to the chief place. Truly, a man is driven by overwhelming floods to feel that he needs something higher than himself, and to feel that is to feel oneself on the way to heaven. "Higher than I,"—

more to be relied upon, nearer God, stronger than man, equal to all the exigencies of life ! Man naturally likes strength, and is stirred into wonder, and often into ambition, by eminence ; his natural condition is to be satisfied only by him who created it. Stop at yourself, and you become an idolater ; ascend to God, and you become a true worshipper. To stop at yourself is to hide your head in the dust while the great universe is shining around you ; to ascend to the High Rock is to catch the light and the inspiration of heaven. God of David, hear our prayer ! Keep us from self-trust, which is self-worship, and lead us to the Rock !

The aspiration is succeeded **by** a recollection :—

“For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy” (ver. 3).

History is rightly used when it becomes the guide of hope. The days of a man’s life seem to be cut off from each other by the nights which intervene ; but they are continuous when viewed from the altitude of divine providence. Yesterday enriches to-day. All the historic triumphs of the divine arm stimulate us in the present battle. We may say of God—What thou hast been, thou wilt be ; because thou hast inclined thine ear unto us, therefore will we call upon thee as long as we live. David was accustomed to turn memory into hope. We remember how the recollection of one victory transfigured him into Israel’s greatest hero,—“The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” Few of us would be doubtful of the future if we would make a right use of the past. We may be very uncertain about to-morrow, but yesterday is a great fact ; it is behind us, a monument of mercy, a witness of God’s integrity, the last page of God’s continual revelation ; and if we read carefully what is written upon it, our spirits will rise with a great hope,—we shall say each to his own soul, “Wait thou only upon God ; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation : he is my defence ; I shall not be moved.”

It is inexpressibly important to keep the mind up to a full

realisation of all that God has done in one's personal history. When a man's own history goes for nothing with him, he may be regarded as having sunk below the level of a man; but if he will watch how God has developed his life, how wondrously he has turned it, how gently he has withdrawn it into "shelter" when the storm was coming, how graciously he has placed it in the "strong tower" when sounds of war shook the air, he will be moved from thankfulness to eloquence, and will say to those who doubtfully look on—"In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us." And is not such a course in strict accordance with what may be termed the logic of the heart? Can any man who thus closely accompanies the unfolding of divine purposes in his life resist the inference that where so much has been done for him he should do something for God? The testimony would be more explicit if the reflection were more accurate; but we are all more or less exposed to the temptation of practical atheism, and we fall into it when we cease to associate God's name with the "shelter" and the "strong tower" to which we owe the protection of our lives.

"I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings" (ver. 4).

How much we desire the tabernacle when we are excluded from its privileges! Some of us have been in foreign lands, where at least our form of worship was almost unknown; the Sabbath has returned, but its face has been unfamiliar, for it has come as if it were but a common day; there has been no friendly challenging to "go into the house of the Lord;" the influence of the world has been strong upon us, yet we have been conscious of a great want. In course of time this experience takes a definite turn; either we cease to care for Sabbatic ordinances and give ourselves up to the current of dissipation in which we have been caught, or the heart sickens for its wonted fellowship with those that keep holyday, and then we say bitterly, yet hopefully, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God;" "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a

dry and thirsty land where no water is ;” thus we come by a painful process to know what David meant when he said, “I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings.” Here is a beautiful combination,—worship and confidence! The relation is not only beautiful, but strictly sequential; for worship is confidence, and confidence is worship. Truly to kneel before God is to express trust in him, and truly to express trust in him is to bow down and worship at his footstool. This is the complete idea of worship: not prayer only, not hope only, not adoration only, not a blind dependence only; but all combined, all rounded into one great act of life.

“Under the covert of thy wings,”—how tender the figure! The bird spreads her wings over the nest where her young ones lie, and thus gives them warmth, and affords them all the little protection in her power. What a beautiful image of unity, defence, completeness, safety, is so frail a thing as the nest of a bird! Multiply that image by infinitude; carry it far above all the mischances which may befall the little home of the bird, and then see how full of comfort is the idea. “In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast;” “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.”

This course of reflection obviates the necessity of a formal application. We have heard of an “overwhelmed heart;” we have also heard of a “high rock;” it only remains to say with Jeremiah, “Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains,” and to add with the Psalmist, “Who is God, save the Lord? or who is a rock, save our God?” We have heard of a “shelter,” and a “tower,” and a “tabernacle,”—words which have much meaning for the heart when its distresses are not to be numbered, and which reach their full explanation only in that great Saving Man who was wounded for our transgressions.

PRAYER.

God be merciful unto us sinners! The priest has sinned, and the ruler, and the whole congregation, and the common people. There is none righteous, no, not one. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. There is no Pharisee standing here to challenge the scrutiny of Heaven. We are bowed down in broken-heartedness, in simple penitence and contrition of soul. In our right hand is no virtue, in our left hand is no price; on our tongue there is no plea or self-defence. We put our hand upon our mouth, and we put our mouth in the dust, and we say: Unprofitable! unclean! God be merciful unto us sinners! We do not stand back one for the other saying: I am holier than thou. There is no holy man without having upon him stains and marks which tell of the great apostacy and the personal fault. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. We welcome that sweet gospel as we would welcome an angel of light in trouble and darkness. It is the voice of God; it is the music of the Eternal Heart. Let it come into our spirits mightily, ruling them with sovereign power into peace, and rest, and hope. We thank thee for such words as we read in the gospels of thy Son. We need them every one; there is not one syllable too many. We need all the tones of thy persuasion, all the voices of thine appeal; for, verily, we knew not how far we were from home until by thy grace we were persuaded to return home and come to our Father's house. Behold! then we knew that we had in very deed taken our journey into a far country. The Lord pity us; the Lord himself stoop down to us, and teach us to look for new heavens and a new earth, brighter eras, grander opportunities of service—maybe of suffering also. Amen.

Psalm lxii. 8.

“Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.”

SELF-COMMUNION.

WHAT good comes of believing in the God of the Bible? What are the practical effects of such faith? Is it something which so remotely and inappreciably affects life as to be a matter of very small concern to us? or is it a faith which touches life at every point; the very sunshine of being, which brings its morning, its summer, its autumnal mellowness and satisfaction?

The answer is suggested in the text,—“Trust in him at all times ; ye people, pour out your heart before him : God is a refuge for us.”

You believe in God ; that is to say, he has a place in your intellectual notions ; you could not on any consideration allow his name to be blotted out of your creed ; you are intellectually sure that he lives. Now, be true to your own creed, and trust in him. You believe that the river runs to the sea, and that the sea is large enough to sustain your ship,—then act upon your faith and launch the vessel. If you keep your vessel on the stocks when she is finished, then all your praises of the ocean go for nothing ; better never have built the ship than leave her unlaunched—a monument of your scientific belief, but also a testimony of your practical infidelity. This figure will serve us still further. This faith in God is truly as a sea-going ship. It is not a little craft meant for river uses, nor a toy-boat to play upon the shore even of the sea, when the sun is shining, and the south wind is as the sweet breath of a sleeping child ; this faith is meant for the wide waters of the great deep, where storms have scope for their fury, where the stars are as guide-posts, and where the sun tells the voyager where he is and gives him the time of heaven. You have this great ship ; she is well-built ; you know her preciousness,—but there you are, hesitating on the river, running down to the harbour-bar and coming back again aghast as if you had seen a ghost : have faith ; pass the bar ; leave the headlands behind ; make the stars your counsellors, and ride upon the great sea by the guidance of the greater sun. This is faith : not a mere nodding of the assenting head, but the reverent risking of the loving, clinging heart. To have a God in your belief is to sit in a ship which is chained upon the stocks ; but to have a God in the heart, ruling the understanding, the conscience, and the will, is to sail down the river, enter upon the great ocean, and pass over the infinite waters into the haven of rest.

“Trust in him at all times.” This is a practical religion. “What time I am afraid, I will trust in God. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress : my God ; in him will I

trust." Religion is not to be occasional, but continuous. In the daytime our faith is to shine as the sun ; in the night-time it is to fill the darkness with stars ; at the wedding-feast it is to turn the water into wine ; in the hour of privation it is to surround the impoverished life with angels of hope and promise ; in the day of death it is to take the sword from the destroyer and to give the victory to him who is apparently worsted in the fight. It is not easy to do this. All this holy and happy issue does not come in uninterrupted sequence ; great fights of affliction have to be endured, daily discipline has to be undergone ; but, blessed be God, the issue is not a mere conjecture, a shining possibility which may or may not be attained ; it has actually been realised by countless numbers of holy men, and upon their testimony we build the doctrine, that what the grace of God has once done it can repeat in full and abiding miracles.

In exercising this trust there are two things to be remembered. First : We get some of the highest benefits of life through our most painful discipline. The very act of trust is a continual strain upon the understanding, the affections, and the will. The trust is not an act accomplished once for all, something that was written down in a book long ago and may be made matter of reference and verification ; religious trust is the daily condition of the soul, the state in which the soul lives and moves and has its being, the source, so to say, from which it draws all its inspirations, the feast at which it sustains its confidence, and the whole condition which underlies and ennobles the best life. We must remember, too, that the time of full explanation is not until by-and-by. No doubt our lives are surrounded by what may be called dead trusts ; a thousand blighted hopes strew our path with ghastly figures and images : it is impossible for us to say that every trust has been verified or every hope has been realised ; as Christian men we have suffered the sharpness and the bitterness of innumerable disappointments ; hardly anything has happened as we wished it to occur ; even when promises have been fulfilled they have come to us in unexpected ways, and have surprised us by relations and influences which had never entered into our reckoning. Amidst all these disappointments, we simply remember that the time of explanation will come when the whole drama of

life is closed ; then we shall see why the prayer was unanswered, why the child whose life we desired was taken away from us, why the one ewe lamb was removed, why the brightest flower in the garden was blighted. A mother may have prayed, for example, for her child's recovery, but the agony of her prayer met with no response from Heaven ; the child died, and the mother's heart became an open tomb. The Christian belief is that this may be so explained in the upper worlds and the longer days, as to give occasion for still further praise to him who rules the land and the sea, in whose hand is every appointment, and whose dominion is over all as a perpetual benediction. We may have to thank God that many of our prayers were not replied to. It is hardly to be questioned that our disappointments may one day come to be reckoned amongst our blessings. We need thus to be taught the lesson of patience, to be chastened, mellowed, and subdued, and to be taught how good a thing it is, not only to wait upon God, but to wait for him, to wait through long days and weary nights, to stand outside heaven's door and to abide there in the confidence that at his own time and in his own way the King will come, and do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. When the fortune of the day goes against us, after we have prayed that it should go for us ; when the battle which was to have ended in our independence has terminated in our beggary, what think we of our trust in God ? Has it not been misplaced ? Has not the fact given the lie to the faith ? Certainly it looks so. Appearances are very frequently against the Christian argument and the Christian confidence. Let us remember, however, that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." The young man said to his father : Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me : I will undertake life on my own account ; I can do better for myself than you are doing for me. Such talk, loud and boastful, we have heard many a day ; but has there been a single instance in which the vanity has not been punished, and the pride dragged through many a humiliation ? It is only by bitter experience that we can be taught our weakness, our ignorance, and the whole meaning of our depravity. It is more than folly on our part to contend that God should have prevented us doing this or that. The fact is, we are men, and being men we have

the power of volition, and we are called to responsibility, not acting as mere machines, but as creatures who can think, reason, compare, deduce, and determine processes for ourselves. It is enough that God should state the whole case and give us the advantage of our own experience and the experience of the whole world, and then should leave us to decide for ourselves what we ought to do. By manifold suffering we come round to the right state of mind. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

The exhortation takes another turn—"Pour out your hearts before him." Though he knows all, yet he must be told all. Make God your confidant. "Arise, cry out in the night; in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord." Hannah said, "I have poured out my soul before the Lord." The figure represents the act of giving up the whole of the contents of the heart to God's keeping. It is not a word now and then that has to be spoken, or a hint that has to be given, or a signal that has to be held out; the action is a complete emptying of the heart, the outpouring of every secret thought, purpose, motive, desire, and affection, that thus the man may stand in a right attitude and relation towards his God. Our communion with Heaven should be unreserved. What we keep back we keep back to our own destruction. It is not enough to plead the omniscience of God as an excuse for not telling him all, because that same reason would cover everything that we do tell him, and render that also unnecessary. Self-communion may be in a very high sense divine communion. There are some things which we ought to say aloud to ourselves, for in the very tone there may be the comfort and the stimulus of worship. We must keep back nothing from ourselves. We may suppose that this is impossible, but experience has proved it to be not only possible but real, to be indeed one of the saddest facts in all life. We throw a curtain over our own motives, we set the whole purpose of life in a false light, we confuse ourselves by the creation of bewildering noises; in a word, we do not deal faithfully and resolutely with ourselves. This being the case, how can we

commune with God? The very act of communion would be a hypocrisy and a lie; it would seem to mean things which it does not really imply. The very first condition to true, profound, and edifying worship is that we should cleanse our hearts of every secret, and pour out the whole contents of our being in penitence and thanksgiving before God: then the vision of heaven will shine upon us, then the comforting angels will be sent with gospels from the throne of grace, then new heavens shall beam above us, and a new earth shall spread out all its flowers and fruits for our delight and our sustenance. O heart! so deceitful, so complicated, often so inexplicable, thou must learn this lesson of self-confession, self-revelation, yea, even self-sacrifice, so that the very uttermost farthing of confession may be made, and the very last tone of contrition may be uttered!

Is there any folly equal to the folly of a man deceiving himself, telling lies to his own soul, and feeding his own spirit with vanity and wind? This is the point at which we must begin; to begin anywhere else is to trifle with the occasion, and actually to tempt God, and practically to blaspheme against his Spirit. Our communion should not only be unreserved, it should be long-continued: "Pray without ceasing." Prayer that is only occasional is not prayer at all, nor can it be, by the very necessity of the case. A man who tries to breathe but once a week cannot live; he attempts to perform an impossibility, and the attempt ends in failure. We live by breathing. As our breathing is continual so ought our aspiration to be unceasing. This is a mystery known only to those who have entered into the secrets of practical and experimental piety. The mistake is often made that prayer must be formal, of the nature of prepared and calculated homage, partaking indeed of the quality of a state occasion,—that is to say, something that must be done according to time and place, and being once done stands in completeness. The only true analogy about the soul's life in reference to communion with God is to be found in the continual breathing of the bodily life. We breathe without knowing it. When we are in health we are not aware that we have a physical nature at all; everything works harmoniously and smoothly and without giving any reminder to the man that he is inhabiting a decaying

or uncertain dwelling-place. It is even so with the soul. There is a sense in which we may enjoy an unconscious piety; that is, a piety that has lived itself out of the region of statute and machinery, scaffolding and external upholding, and that poses itself as on strong wings at the very gate of the morning. This is not carelessness: it may be the very last expression of long-continued spiritual culture.

There should be some difference of a most obvious and practical kind between those who believe in God and those who do not. Trust in God should express itself in calmness and beneficence of life. What hope ought he to have whose confidence is in the living God! Hope seizes the whole future, and treats it as an immediate present, for all purposes of edification and stimulus. Jesus Christ for the joy that was set before him endured the Cross. Whilst we are upon earth we may yet in all high spiritual effects be in heaven, walking before the throne, drinking at the living fountains of water, and enjoying the ineffable calm of the celestial state. But all this may be of the nature of rhapsody or high contemplation. All this, however, is to be sustained and exemplified by actual practical generosity as between man and man. The Christian should live to give. Christianity is expenditure. We have nothing that we have not received, and because we have all things in Christ we are to give and labour with both hands earnestly, leaving God to provide for the future as the future may reveal itself. To a precious hope, and a lavish generosity, must be added the spirit of audacious enterprise in all matters pertaining to the kingdom of God. Those who trust in the Living One cannot rest until other men have been brought to him in simple faith and love. This indeed is the peculiarity of the Christian religion above all others,—namely, that it constrains its believers to go forth and preach the Gospel to every creature under heaven. What an irony it is to see men who professedly trust in the living God going up and down the earth gloomily and sadly, beclouded with forebodings, and affrighted by spectres and superstitions! Something, of course, may be traced to physical temperament, and to hereditary affliction; at the same time the very fact of professing religion ought to bring with it vivacity, hopefulness, courage, and lead a

man to speak about the Father with all the calmness of personal certitude. What, then, are we to say to those who, looking on such gloomy minds, taunt us with the effect of the Christian religion? Surely they have some justification for their jibe and sarcasm. They say, Look at such men : they profess the religion of Christ, they attend the sanctuary regularly, they are numbered amongst the nominal saints ; and yet how fearful they are, how easily dispirited, how they vex themselves concerning the market, the harvest, or the issue of adventure ; better not be a Christian if this is Christianity. The taunt is surely not without reason ; let that be admitted once for all ; but the Christian may instantly reply, It is true that such men are far from exhibiting the cheerfulness of Christianity, but what would they have been without the Christian religion ? If they are so gloomy with it, what would have been their despondency without it ? For such men to hold up their heads at all, to see even one inch of blue in all the dark firmament, is a miracle which only God could accomplish. Let us then fix our minds upon this aspect, and not yield the argument when it is contended that Christianity always brings with it peace, joy, and glad expectation. Life should be seen to be far-extending in its relations, and requiring long time for its full development and explanation. It is in the long reach that the great explanation lies. The very fact that our satisfactions are not immediate and complete may arise from the dignity and duration of our being. The insect may be satisfied here and now, little capacities may be filled without trouble ; but in proportion to the largeness, the greatness, the dignity, the spiritual grandeur of any being, must be the time required for complete and enduring development. Blessed be God, then, for this cheering word. He wishes to elicit our trust. If we may so say it, we can give God no greater pleasure than to cast all our care upon him, to entrust to him every concern and every detail of life with absolute fearlessness and perfect consecration. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. Our downsitting is of consequence to God, and our uprising is matter of note in heaven ; yea, our going out and our coming in would seem to touch the solicitude of our Father.

All this will be romantic to the man who has had no spiritual

experience; but we must not consult the blind upon colours, or the deaf upon harmonies, or the dead upon the duties, the enjoyments, and the sacrifices of life. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." The natural man does not understand spiritual things; they can only be spiritually discerned. Let us therefore never be afraid of confessing our faith because there are some men who seem to have no faith capacity. There is a native language which belongs to Christians alone, and they must never be deterred from speaking in their native tongue because they are in a land of strangers and foreigners. My soul, boast thou in the living God: boldly utter his name, lift up his banner, and say, He will take care of me; by his strength I will run through a troop and leap over a wall, and because his infinite comforts are round about me I shall be delighted in darkness, satisfied in famine, and filled with strength which no enemy can overthrow. We ought to have more of this loud thanksgiving in the Church. We are solid enough in doctrine; we are perfectly sure of our main theological positions: but all this is not enough; prayer should rise into praise, praise should become the very rapture of the soul, and in all the high excitement which is legitimate to the spiritual life we should abolish death, and forget all the meanness of time, and attach ourselves to all the solemnity and grandeur of eternity. Great thoughts enlarge the mind. Great conceptions should enlarge and cheer the heart. The Christian thinker deals with nothing that is not large, either in itself or its relations. How large-minded, then, should they be who are one with God in Christ, who are connected with all the eternal purpose of Heaven, and who are daily looking for the outshining of the infinite glory! We must lift up our heads and behold who created the heavens and all their host; and claiming these as the creation of our Father we must excite ourselves into holy rapture by the confident assurance that all the worlds are ours, and if even their treasures could be exhausted God could create more worlds and larger than have ever yet shone in all the infinity of space.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we thank thee that thou hast shown us unto ourselves. No man knoweth what is in him ; only thy Spirit can reveal the soul to itself. When the Spirit of Truth is come it will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come ; it will read our inmost thoughts to us, and read all surrounding history in its right tone. We know nothing as it ought to be known, we cannot tell what we are thinking about, we do not hear our own voices ; help us then to receive thy revelation of human nature, and to stand aghast at all the wondrous things which are shown to us concerning ourselves. Save us from self-delusion ; destroy the deceit which tells any man that he is good ; show us how impossible it is for us to show our goodness in the noontide of God's purity. Thus abase us ; take us out of ourselves, that, seeing the hideous sight, we may fall down and cry bitterly for the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus the Saviour. We deceive ourselves, we say we are good, we think we are good, we count our virtues and our moralities, and add them up into reputation and character : save us from this lie, show us that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, that it has its gala day, its time of bannering and trumpeting, wherein it exceedingly lauds its own respectability and honour. We want to see the inmost heart, the real motive, and we want to see it as God sees it ; then shall we cry out at midnight, What must I do to be saved ? Thus do thou prepare us to receive thy gospel, O Son of God ; may we listen to it as contrite men ; may we pay attention to thy gospel as men would attend to those who are come to declare liberty to the captive. Destroy all inattentiveness, worldliness, reluctance on our part, and fill us with that solemn eagerness which asks that it may receive, seeks that it may find, knocks that the door may be opened unto it. We will sing of thy mercy, thou Giver of all good ; thou hast not withheld thine hand from us ; yea with both hands hast thou scattered upon our life-path the bounty of thy love. No good thing will the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly : help us by thy Spirit to walk in uprightness before God, that we may claim things present and things to come, things on earth and things in heaven. Guide us every day. We need thy presence every moment : the days are mysteries, they are questions that require to be answered, they are problems that must be solved ; but we have no light or truth or wisdom but in God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, as he is revealed to us by God the Holy Ghost. Come to us then, and undertake our whole training ; leave nothing to ourselves, or we will play the fool before God : watch us at every point, and during every moment ; before our thought has shaped itself do thou purify it, O Holy Spirit. Thou wilt not wait until our thoughts become

words, and our words become actions; we want thee at the very first, before we know what we are thinking about, not to purify the thought, but to purify the thinker; make the tree good, and then the fruit shall be good. Thou hast led us by ways that we knew not; we said, This is the end, and, lo, it became but the beginning! we said, The next billow will overwhelm us, and lo, it died a mile away! we said, We cannot endure this great agony, and behold thou didst strengthen us so that we were wonders unto ourselves, and we came out of all the pain and havoc, saying, This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Thou dost train us wondrously; when we become ambitious, thou dost cut the capital from the pillar and leave it bare, unfinished, and naked, a stalk ashamed of itself; when we think we can do without God, behold thou sendest the wolves upon us that they may teach us how to pray; when we say we shall die in our nest, thou dost tear the little straws to pieces and scatter them upon the winds. All this, if we accept it in thy spirit, blessed Saviour, shall be for our good, for our refinement and chastening, and we shall come out of it richer, because holier, meek and quiet because strong and triumphant in faith. Regard all for whom we ought to pray,—the old and the young, the weary ones who want to glide away and be tormented no more by earth's activities and mockeries; and the young and the ardent, the enthusiastic and the passionate, who think they are going to storm all fortresses and take them, and lo! at the end they will say with the dejected prophet, I am no better than my fathers. Father in heaven, be our Father; Saviour of the Cross, cleanse us in thy blood; Holy Spirit, the mystery of all being, forsake us not, nor leave us, for we are the work of the hands of God. Amen.

Psalm lxi.

PROVOCATION AND IMPRECATION.

NOBODY knows who wrote this poem. All the little headings and ascriptions are of purely human origin, and therefore no reliance is to be put upon them except they be corroborated by historical proofs. Otherwise we read at the head of this psalm, "A Psalm of David;" but who wrote that heading is probably as little known as who wrote the psalm itself. It does not apply to David, because there are some things here that never occurred in his lifetime; it does not apply to Christ wholly, because there are some things here which he never could have said, notably, "O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee." Who, then, wrote the psalm? I think we can tell. It has a large authorship. Everybody who has known anything of the deeper experiences of human life wrote this psalm. We wrote it, though it be thousands of years old, if we have passed through experiences

such as it describes : and we have done so in some degree. Every soul that has seen life in anything like its proper scope and its true reality has been exactly where this man describes himself to have been. All his prayers, sufferings, aspirations, imprecations, are ours.

How often we think of water and billow and wave and sea when we are in trouble ! Not, the wolves have pursued me ; not, the lions have opened their mouths and roared upon me ; though these figures are not wanting when we seek to describe some aspects of human experience : but, "the waters are come in unto my soul. . . . I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." We never know what water is going to do. We know what the wolf is about : there is no pity in the wolf's eye ; but "water"—is that water which is rolling in the leaf of the flower ? is that water which is made into pearly dew ? Yes, that is water. Is that water which is shaped into a rainbow, acted upon by the transfiguring sun ? Yes, that is water. Is that water which is like a mirror in the valley, redoubling the sky and redoubling the hills, and taking the roughness out of the shaggy forest, and making it a thing of still rarer beauty ? Yes, that is water. Can it ever be angry ? What can be so angry as water ? It sweeps away whole cities and towns as it roars and plunges in terrific floods down the narrow valleys. Is that the dew ? Yes, in another form, that is the dew. Trouble may begin like dew, and then may trickle in upon us, and then may greatly increase its volume, it may become a river, a torrent, a cataract, and may go on even to become a great sea. Beware of beginnings. That which is very simple at first may become very awful at last. We talk of a "sea of trouble" : the poet was right when he formed and expressed that daring and tumultuous image.

"I sink." What feeling is equal to that ? The man cannot fight, for he has no standing-ground ; he cannot run away, for the earth will not afford him a place to run upon : he goes down more and more ; presently he will be engulfed. The man can do nothing. Here is an image of helplessness, of direst despair. So long as a man can run or walk or defend himself in any

degree, his dejection is saved from despair ; but the process of sinking—that is a doctor's word. The doctor says, " The patient is sinking." We know the meaning of that expression ; there is no longer any sphere of combat or collision or defence ; the motion is downward.

In all this trouble we come upon the puzzle of all ages :—
" They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head : they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty." If that were a whole view we might well close the book of revelation and say we must look elsewhere for interpretation and for comfort. Yet when men are sinking they cannot be philosophers ; expressions are driven out of them which will not bear to be analysed and balanced and estimated by cold and sober reason. It is well to have momentary expressions ; it is instructive sometimes to have our sentences cut off in the middle. When our eloquence is guillotined we are often surprised at our own insanity. Imagination gives up life's battle too soon : piercing, burning agony is not a calm, tranquil reasoner, saying, I will follow out this analysis, and see to what rich conclusion it leads. When the soul is aflame, as it were with the fire of hell, it will commit itself to bold and broad and indefensible statement. In that condition we over-estimate the might of the enemy ; we think the clouds are armies, we suppose all the firm trees on the hillside to be moving down upon us in great hosts ; whereas, when we recover ourselves, and stand at the centre of things, and look round about us with the eyes of true piety, we see that the flowers were not against us, that the forests were no foes of ours, and that we multiplied the strength of the enemy because our imagination was inspired by fear. In our sober moments, when we can pray with our whole heart, and hold God in intercourse with our whole voice, we know perfectly well that there are no enemies any man can have that are worthy of a moment's attention. No man can harm you ; the devil cannot stain your character : it is for the man himself to say what shall be the issue of trial, discipline, collision, combat. God has given each man the power, not the right, of suicide.

A wondrous conflict is proceeding in the mind of this poet.

He says, "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake : let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." This is what we call in common society *esprit de corps*,—the spirit of the body, the spirit of the club, the spirit of the brotherhood or the church. This poet is afraid that if he misbehaves himself people will exalt themselves against God, and say with mocking laughter, These are thy saints ! Even whilst he is sinking he would wish to do it with some grace. Extinction itself may be crowned with a species of honour. Death need not be humiliation. There are men who have so died as to have lived a thousand lives in their last combat. Have we lost *esprit de corps* ? Do you not remember that we are involved in the way in which you bear your troubles ? If you do not play the man now the enemy will laugh at the whole Church ; he will gladly take you up as a specimen of God's sustaining grace, and say, This is the man who prayed : how chopfallen now ! see how that once proud chin hangs on the collapsing breast : this is prayer ! If I do not bear myself heroically in the storm, the enemy will have a right to laugh at this pulpit, and to put his foot of contempt upon this whole ministry. If I play the atheist in the darkness, then may men justly mock what I endeavour to say in the light. The mockery will be directed against God, not against men. Moses felt this ; he said, If they go back, they will say thou thyself wert not able to take us forward ; and if saints do not play the hero in the time of real combat and desperate difficulty, when everything is going down, when business is dull, when enemies are strong, when health is quaking, people will blame not them only but God, and say, This is the doing of the Lord ; why, what advantage is it that we pray to him ? or what profit have we in waiting upon God ? the saint and the dog die in the same agony. Thus we recover ourselves, under the blessing of God, by thinking of others. Fathers should remember this. What will your sons say if they see you playing the coward ? Why, it will be more than human on their part to play anything else themselves. The whole family will go up or go down in your temper : you give the keynote, you conduct the song ; it is for you to say whether the music shall rise into rapture, and crown itself with triumph, or whether it shall dwindle and die and be forgotten,

gladly forgotten, for it was the groan of a defeated soul. All men who lead society to any considerable extent ought to remember the action of this. For they cannot fall or fail alone. They themselves will be blamed, and their principles will be mocked, and their memory will be a trust which no man will undertake, for who would lock up a shame in his strong-box and say, Lo, I am the trustee of this cowardice?

The poet says, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." He knew what he had been doing; he had taken his own temperature every day, he watched the thermometer of his soul; he had become so zealous about God that the reproaches of those who reproached God fell upon him. We might read the text with proper syntax reversely, and say, "And the reproaches of them that are fallen upon me are also fallen upon thee, O God." It is well to remember that God and his people go together. You cannot reproach a good man without reproaching God; you cannot reproach Providence without reproaching the whole Church. There are circumstances under which God will not be separated from his people. They that receive you receive me, and they that receive me, said Christ, receive him that sent me. Not only is the Church to be one, the Church is to be **one in God**; God and the Church are to be one, and indivisible.

A very fine feature in this poet's character comes out in the tenth and eleventh verses. He made some endeavour to conciliate men; he thought he would handle society with tact: instead of being a saint, he would be a manager; instead of being a suppliant always, he would undertake the work of manipulation. Let us see what it all came to. When a man leaves his prayer that he may begin to manage society—a trick I counsel you never to learn—it comes to this: "When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach;" they mocked me, they heard my prayers and turned them back upon me; when I cried my very eyes out because of the bitterness of my soul they mimicked my weeping, they became my echoes; "I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them;" they made a maxim of me, a joke, a sneer; they quoted

me in their songs, and those that were most ribald were most free in their iniquitous and humiliating criticisms upon me. Never attempt to coax society ; have nothing to do with mean compromises. If there is any mystery in your life, face it, wait its solution, accept it as a chastisement or an opportunity for self-refinement ; but never endeavour to conciliate society by making light of any of the mysteries of God. And never show your deepest agonies to those who cannot understand them. You have no right to cry in public ; you are forbidden to show your sores to those who will only mock God because of the harrowing sight ; seek the prophet, cultivate fellowship with kindred spirits who know the tragedy and pain of life, and who have large experience, and who can, out of the consolations with which they themselves have been comforted, encourage and sustain your soul. As for the enemy, and the drunkards who make songs out of human misery, you do not belong to that masonry ; renounce it, and never give the enemy an opportunity to mock your sorrow.

Still the poet says he will be firm ; come what may he will be found at the right place :—" But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time : O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation." Here is what may be termed proved constancy. Here is something that cannot be trifled with, or cannot be moved about by sleight of hand ; here is a faith that lies beyond the line of surprise. It cannot be amazed into unbelief. There is a growing faith, struggling and feeble more or less, that sometimes is almost half-infidel ; it requires time, richer experience, large opportunity for development, and then at the last it becomes stalwart, herculean, massive, immovable. We want faith that has been tested ; we want men who have come up through all the cloud of doubt and by the grace of God have been enabled to lift up their heads into the cloudless sunshine. There is a way, so we have heard, of evading all doubt, and sorrow of soul, and difficulty, and getting into heaven by some unnamed road. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of that statement. There are those who have never had doubt or fear or difficulty ; they have always sung the same song, and the same words, in the same key, and never have been devoid of real spiritual cheerfulness ; they have come into the

world, and have passed through it, and have gone up into heaven singing all the time. I will not undertake to endorse that view of the case. They have made no mark in history, they have left behind them nothing that fear-stricken spirits can take hold of, saying, This is human consolation, sent for my nourishment and edification. The faith that would rule the world now is a faith that has come up through all the infidelities, and stands immeasurably above them all. We do not want some secretly gained faith that has never tested the weather; we want a faith that has encountered the enemy all the way and smitten him, and has come up to the top by the grace and goodness of God, and therefore will pray wherever the floods are, and will find a kneeling-place even in the mire. Be afraid of those persons who have never gone out into difficult circumstances, who have never encountered the enemy, who have never seen the wilderness of temptation, and who have never read anything calculated to shape their faith: have confidence in the men who have seen it all, who have spent forty days and forty nights with the devil, who have seen infidelity, unbelief, atheism, in all their varieties, postures, and possibilities, and have left them below. These are the men whose record will be living annotations upon the living gospel.

Even now the poet begins to hope. He says,—“Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me”: say, Thus far shalt thou come, no farther; define the limit of trial, remember my frame, reflect that I am but dust, and have pity upon me, O God of my salvation. Whilst there is life there is hope; man's extremity is God's opportunity. The man is in the mire, and he is sinking, yet he says, Lord, so long as my mouth is above the mire there is time for thee to come and save; a moment more and all will be over, but it is into a moment thou canst condense thine own eternity. “Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.” In Eastern lands the pits were covered with stones; the stone was put there to protect the water from defilement, and to prevent travellers from plunging into unseen depths; so this man says, I am in the well, but do not let the stone be put upon the top of it,

let not the pit shut its mouth upon me. The placing of the stone on the well was called shutting its mouth. So even at that last point, when the men were lifting the stone and going to put it upon the top of the well, even then, said the poet, God can come to me, and even yet can mightily deliver me.

Then comes a change of spiritual key in the twenty-second verse. There was provocation enough; the man had a good cause from a merely human standpoint; when they gave him gall for his meat, and when in his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink, he might well be excused, humanly speaking, from desiring that what they had done to him might be done to themselves. We do not know what is in our hearts until we are tried; you do not know that your best friend is a Christian until you have seen him under insult; you know nothing about any man until you have seen him opposed. Many a man there is with a nice reputation and a sleek name, and a person who is spoken of as being extremely amiable, whom you have never seen under difficulty. Let some one oppose him, disappoint him, insult him, then you will know what he is. There are saints to-day who if their self-love were wounded would prove themselves to be the veriest atheists upon earth. Yet they have prayed an hour in the morning, and are ready to pray another hour in the evening. What covers them is a film of piety; that film is spread over a whole body of devilry. You know what you are when you find yourselves in an unlawful passion. This man prays that God will deal very heavily and hardly with enemies. The man probably did not know what he was talking about. We do not understand the force of our own words. There are circumstances under which a man is not to be held responsible for his own statements, though the man be perfectly sane, because he does not know the atmosphere in which he is speaking, the circumstances under which he is delivering himself; he does not know the balance and force of the words he is using. In order to know what he is saying he must consult the persons who hear him. We speak of the phonograph, and think it a very wonderful instrument; so it is; there is one peculiarity about it which men of science have pointed out, namely, that the only men who do not recognise the voice are the men to whom

the voice belongs. When the phonograph speaks, all a man's friends say, "That is your voice, how distinct, how wonderful, how vivid I do you not hear it?" And the man says, "That is not my voice." The only man who does not recognise the tone of the phonograph is the man whose voice it is repeating. So infidels do not recognise their own arguments. When they see men devastated by them, when they see young men rise from their knees, and say then they will pray no longer, the infidel wants to avoid all responsibility, and says, "I never said that, I never meant that." Why science is against him, the phonograph is against him; he thinks he never said it, but he said every word of it, only he did not understand what he was saying; the words meant one thing to him, and another to the person who heard them. But we shall be judged by our deeds, our effects, and not always by our purposes. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Say to certain persons that their words have been grievous, sharp, unkind, and they will deny that they ever uttered the words, just as the man denied that the voice emitted by the phonograph was his; but fate will avenge the injury, science will come and be a witness against the foolish person, and every man will have to give account of himself to God for the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil. Do not bind a man, therefore, to his imprecations. He does not wholly mean that these things should be deluged or destroyed, or pursued by evil spirits, or stung by hornets; he did not mean all that: only at the time these great expressions seemed best to set forth the tumult of his agitation. Men who are in Christ never utter imprecatory prayers, they never write imprecatory psalms; when they dip their pen for the purpose of writing such poetry, a voice arrests them, saying, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Do not undertake to punish your enemies. Have nothing to do with dealing out penalties to men who have wronged you. God's mills grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small, and there is no coward or sneak or base man or sharp-eyed, clever-fingered thief who has done you wrong that shall not, if he do not repent, be ground to powder.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou who art merciful and gracious, full of compassion and long-suffering and tenderness, thou art kind to the unthankful and to the evil ! We come to thee with our offering of praise, inasmuch as thou hast crowned our life with loving-kindness and tender mercy and made it beautiful with continual love. We praise thee ; we magnify thee ; we offer thee the whole strength of our heart. We come to thee as those who have been mocked by the promises of the world, and who long to find satisfaction in thine infinite and unspeakable peace. We have been disappointed. The staff has been broken in our hand and pierced us. We have hewn unto ourselves cisterns ; they are broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Foiled, smitten, wounded, humiliated and disgraced, we come into thy presence, knowing that in God as revealed in the person and doctrine of Jesus Christ, and made known unto us by the ministry of the Holy Ghost, we can find rest which our souls could not find elsewhere. All our springs are in thee. Thou givest us what we need. They who are in thy presence, who live in thy light, and thy love, hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither are subjected to weariness or decay. We would live in God. We would have our being in the Eternal. We would know nothing among men but Jesus and him crucified ; and by the mystery of pain and the mystery of love, symbolised by Christ's Cross, we would endure the trials of the world, and discharge the whole service of life. Meet us as sinners, and pardon us ! The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. May we know its cleansing, healing power ! We have done the things we ought not to have done ; we have withheld the testimony which it became us to deliver ; we have often been timid and unfaithful ; we have hesitated when we ought to have gone forward ; our word has been untrue ; our spirit has been worldly ; our very prayers have been selfish. All this we say when we truly know ourselves, and we are revealed to ourselves by the in-dwelling, all-disclosing Spirit. God be merciful to us sinners, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Amen.

Psalm lxxii.

THE KINGSHIP OF JESUS.

THERE has not been wanting a disposition to empty the so-called Messianic psalms, of their references to Jesus Christ. In a sense, it is not only right but spiritually profitable to get at the immediate and literal meaning of prophecy and

psalm, and every other Scripture ; at the same time, why should there be any other disposition to limit the signification of the sacred writers to local and transient events, when many of them are evidently charged with greater meaning than can be justly limited to any one occasion ? As a rule of criticism we should determine in the first instance to find out the literal and grammatical meaning of every passage, and where possible to fix the local operation of its primary significance ; but this being done it is open to the religious imagination to fill in all the larger meanings of which the sacred words are susceptible, and where the history justifies the application of larger meanings the critic should take his stand upon historical conditions and vindicate himself by realisations which may not have entered into the dream of the original writer. It is quite within the compass of easy proof that many of the writers of holy Scripture did not themselves know the full extent of their own meaning. As in nature, so in revelation ; even a stone may be put to various uses ; all the elements of the earth may be gathered up and shaped into unexpected significations and symbolisms : and so a man may have written words which he himself limited as to time and space, and yet the meaning of inspiration may reach infinitely further than the boundaries which he imposed upon himself in setting down what he supposed to be his own words. For my part, I cannot read this psalm without feeling that as applied and limited to Solomon it is an intolerable exaggeration. There is no reason why Solomon should not take his place in the psalm as being in some way prefigured by its symbolism and apocalypse, but being like ourselves only a man, there are expressions in the psalm which could not be literally applied to any human creature. If we are severely literal in one direction, we must be equally severe in the other ; and according to this equal law we shall save ourselves from applying to King Solomon words which in their natural meaning would involve a species of idolatry and even blasphemy. In no profound sense should prayer be made to any man continually, nor daily should he be praised ; nor should his name endure for ever in any other sense than what is generally understood by the term reputation or fame. It is evident, furthermore, that all nations could not call Solomon blessed, except in his relations to One greater than

himself and his father. Allowing, therefore, that Solomon has his place in the references of this psalm, we still adhere to the holy conviction that the psalm is only fulfilled in all its emblems, metaphors, and prognostications, by the King of kings and Lord of lords. We are entitled to go back and interpret prophecy by history, and we know of no psalm which more readily yields itself to historical interpretation than this noble ode.

The king often represented God to the Hebrew mind. The king was the medium through which the Hebrew poet and worshipper saw as much as possible of the divine nature and government; he was, indeed, a kind of incarnation of the divine righteousness and clemency: hence the veneration with which the very name of the king was regarded, and hence the confidence that it was impossible for him to be wicked, to pervert judgment, or to do wrong. The king was thus interpreted, not in his limited personality, but in the symbolism of his office, and so interpreted he became as god to the nations over which he reigned. The king referred to in this psalm is one who has peculiar regard for the poor and the children of the needy, and by virtue of that regard he sets himself in continual hostility to the oppressor and to those who live by unrighteousness. Surely this prophecy was fulfilled in the Son of God, whose words of recognition in reference to the poor were charged with the sublimest tenderness, and whose anger to those who were hypocritical and oppressive and selfish burned like an oven. The gentleness of Christ is beautifully represented by the words, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth,"—there shall be nothing of tempest in his way of coming, nothing of violence; no storm shall follow in his track, as he moves forward to save and comfort the sons of men: he shall, so to say, be best represented by those processes of nature which are most gracious; he shall be part of the very grain that blesses the earth; he shall mingle with the light which brings the morning; he shall be within the warmth that comforts and fertilises the earth with gracious heat: no special chariot of thunder shall be created in which he may go forth; rather will he join the simplest and most familiar processes of nature, and come as one who attracts no attention except by the

consciousness of fuller grace which he works in every heart that receives him.

The more active aspects of his ministry are shown in such words as—"In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." These words are pregnant even with military meaning, for they signify that, stand in the way who may, or what may, all shall go down before the progress of the kingdom of Christ. There is no threatening of hostility, there is no defiance of evil powers; nothing of the nature of challenge enters into these solemn and gracious words; yet there they stand in all the solidity of a decree, in all the brightness of a prophetic hope—"he shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth"—how much is involved in this promise, what a lifting up of things that are cast down, what a smoothing of rough places, what an overturning of evil fortresses, what an implication of Omnipotence! All these things can only find their fulfilment, and the perfectness of their glory, in the rule of him who was made perfect through suffering. We are told, indeed, in more aggressive language, that "his enemies shall lick the dust": this need not imply any violence being inflicted upon the enemies, although that also comes within the scope of the divine government and purpose; but it may mean that such shall be the progress of right, such the vindication of justice, such the comfort which the poor shall realise and enjoy and through which they shall be strengthened, that the enemies of Christ shall be bowed down with shame and confusion, and shall seek a dwelling-place within the very shadow of his feet.

Not only are the poor to be blessed, and all the humble to be sustained and nourished by the comforting grace of Christ, but all the great powers of the earth, as typified by kings and rulers, shall offer their crowns to the Son of God,—“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.” Thus the Son of God **does not rule along one line only, as if he were limited in grace**

or confined in power ; he rules with both hands, he covers the whole space, he throbs in every pulse of time ; nothing is kept back from him, for his right extends over all things, seeing that he made all things, and without him was not anything made that was made. How these kingdoms shall be brought into submission we are not told, but even here there are two processes by which kings and kingdoms, thrones and empires, may fall to the lot of the Son of man, as a part of his decreed and eternal possession. The mighty powers of the earth may be smitten down and crushed by irresistible force. Almightyness may breathe upon them, and cause them to lose all their pride, and to give up all that is defiant and hostile ; or a great spiritual operation may take place within the heart of the mighty and the noble, and they may be lured from all that is ambitious, worldly, and selfish, and be brought in humble homage to the Son of man, uncrowning themselves before his majesty, and offering him the tribute of their worship and love. This is the supreme method by which Christ makes men known, by which he enlarges and consolidates his kingdom. He will not have kings or subjects merely chained to his throne as if they were slaves ; he will have them bound to his person and to his purposes, by the consent of their love, by the homage of their hearts, by the yielding of their illuminated and sanctified judgment. He acquires his supreme and eternal power over men by delivering the needy when they cry, and the poor, and him that hath no helper ; by sparing the poor and the needy, and saving the souls of the needy ; by redeeming their souls from deceit and violence, and by counting their blood precious in his sight. He thus lays hold of the very foundations of society, and works his upward way to the very topmost stratum, taking with him all men, women, and children,—poor, feeble, homeless, lost ; and never resting until he has brought within the circle of his sovereignty, and the helpfulness of his benediction, men of every grade and quality. Predictions of this kind could never be fulfilled in any one merely human personality. They encompass too great a scope to be thus fulfilled. It is the glory of the Son of man that he knows every heart, speaks every language, is present in every clime, and that throughout all the days of time he grows upon the consciousness of men with ever-increasing and ever-brightening vividness. No language is

foreign to him ; no life is beneath his regard ; no place is too remote for his visitation ; all things lie before the vision of his love, and everything is touched by his redeeming power. The earth longs for some such ruler. All the rulers that have been, all the monarchs that have come and gone, have surely been charged with the meaning that there is yet to come a King whose right it is to reign and whose dominion shall extend over all the earth. Such a king we see in Christ Jesus. Blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory ; Amen, and Amen. Oh that those who love the Saviour would arise, and clothe themselves with all their spiritual light, and proclaim to those who have never heard of the Son of man how great he is, how rich in promise, how richer still in all that can redeem, touch, and bless the heart of the world. Jesus Christ trusts himself to the love of his Church ; he cannot but feel that a Church which loves him with all its heart will not keep silence respecting his name, but will go forth from land to land proclaiming it with all the emphasis of thankfulness and affection. It is for the Church to say what part it will take in bringing about the glad and heavenly time when the fruit of the handful of corn which God himself has sown shall shake like Lebanon and be a store of nutriment to all mankind. It is not enough to read poetry of this kind, to be charmed with its sweet cadences, and to regard it in a merely literary aspect ; all that is poetical, tender, and charming in divine promise and prediction should be turned into nerve and power and courage, through which the Gospel shall be preached fearlessly in all lands, however great the obstructions, however bitter and resolute the hostility. We have a glorious King to proclaim. We need not be ashamed of his name, of his descent, of his decrees, of his power. If any man shall ask who he is, and what right he has to reign, let the inquirer find the answer in our lives, in our pureness, in our tenderness, in our charity, in our self-sacrifice ; and let the world feel that any king who can make men so characterised is worthy of universal confidence, and is alone fitted to occupy with dignity and beneficence the throne of universal empire.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, if we are not afraid of thee, we owe our confidence and boldness to Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour and our Priest. By him we come to thee, boldly asking that we may find grace to help in time of need. We have no confidence in ourselves, but we have confidence in the Cross—the key that opens heaven, the way into the broad universe, because the way into pardon and purity and peace. We come by that way time after time, and our feet delight to walk it, for in walking it our hearts glow with sacred fire. Jesus himself joins us, and makes our hearts burn with love, and sets before us in the furthest distance a light that makes us glad. We bless thee for the revelation of Christ Jesus, Son of man, Son of God, Physician of souls, Redeemer of sinners. He is our supreme joy, our infinite trust; in him we have peace, and in him we have eternal joy. Cleanse us in his most precious blood, purify our hearts by faith, drive away from our souls all temptations towards self-trust and forgetfulness of God, and comfort us with a sense of thy continual presence in the light and in the darkness, in all the beauty of summer, and in all the cold and bitterness of winter. May we always know thee to be near, and, knowing that, our souls shall have no straitness and narrowness, but shall live in an infinite liberty; and our joy, like our peace, shall be unspeakable. Amen.

Psalm lxxvii. 3.

"I remembered God, and was troubled."

TROUBLED BY THOUGHTS OF GOD.

ALL great doctrines seem to be proved by consciousness and by experience, rather than by mere texts, and certainly rather than by mental expertness and enterprise. If called upon to prove the immortality of the soul we should not think of referring to any book for a proof of it. Whatever belongs to man is best proved by man himself; man on all such subjects is himself the book. If there are external declarations of man's immortality, they must find an answer in the man himself, or they will be but so many starting-points of wordy and angry controversy. When, therefore, challenged to produce a text which asserts the immortality of the soul, we produce the soul

itself. Why this discontent with time? Why this restlessness in the face, and even in the possession, of all the treasures which earth can afford? Why this thirst which rivers cannot slake? Why this hunger that eats up all the fatlings of the earth and all the banquets of time, and then is as keen and unappeased as if nothing had been devoured? It is in that dissatisfaction with time, sense, earth, space, and all that is comprehended under the word "finiteness," that I find my proof, because my "consciousness" of immortality. You can argue down a text, but you have to argue down yourself before you can dismiss, as the supreme thought of your mind, your spiritual dignity and your kinship with God. This much illustratively. The immediate subject is not the immortality, but the apostacy of man. Why should there be any theological warfare about a Fall? We do not need a text to prove it; a text may confirm it, but the proof, in the deeper sense of that term, is at the very core of the heart. We know, we feel, we cannot argue, we need not inquire—in ourselves is the tragical and sublime demonstration. It is just here that the whole Church has been in danger of getting wrong. It has been referring to a book outside man, rather than to a book written in the very heart of man. I have not to be told that I am fallen; I know it; I am but revealed to myself. Revelation in all such matters is but a mirror held up to the heart's own vision, and in so far as the heart sees itself in revelation is revelation confirmed in its inspiration and authority. You cannot get hold of the whole world by anything that is written in a book, if there be not in the heart to which the book addresses itself confirmatory and unanswerable evidence. Were I now to make a business of fashioning the most complete and trenchant phrases which the English language would enable me to construct in proof of human depravity, you might escape my argument and my appeal. It is easy to get out of words, however intricate the network, however complete the entanglement. The mind swiftly cuts its way out of all this metaphysical twine and cordage, and rejoices in a freedom sometimes roughly, but always certainly, secured. But you cannot escape from your own consciousness. How our hearts condemn us! When a man says, "Thinking of God gives me trouble," we find in that confession the doctrine which he would never allow to

be proved by subtle argument or Scriptural quotation. That a creature can be afraid of its Creator, that a child on remembering its parent can be troubled—these are ironies and contradictions which we cannot for a moment tolerate without explanation. That is unnaturalness, that is irrationalism with completeness and appalling emphasis. Find a child who says, "I remembered my father, and was troubled," and such an assertion carries with it one of two things—either something is wrong with the child, or something is wrong with the parent. There is wrong somewhere. Carry this illustration to its ultimate point in religious thinking, "I remembered God, and was troubled." Then there is something wrong in God, or something wrong in man. That there is something wrong in God we resent as a blasphemy; the wrong, therefore, is in us, and in that wrong we find the proof that we have not only stumbled and halted here and there, but have fallen, and are before God depraved and helpless.

This appeal gives strength to the Christian preacher; he is not standing upon so many sharp stones of technicality and theological phrase; his Bible is the human heart, his evidence is human life, his illustrations are in human experience. Where, then, is the Bible? It occupies the position of revealing a man to himself, and of proceeding upon a basis of facts. Revelation does not create an airy world, it reveals the world to itself exactly as it is. That is inspiration. Do not fret yourselves with difficult and recondite inquiries about inspiration; find it in the fact that the Bible has anticipated all history, outrun all competitors in pursuit of the destiny of the race, has answered all inquiries, covered all ground, and is waiting our progress that it may advance still further and allure us on by the persuasion of light to other advances and broader conquests. Any book that told a white man he was black would not be regarded as a revelation, but as a lie. When the Bible tells us that we are by nature the children of wrath, we are not to fly off into metaphysical self-defences, but to come unto such a text as this: "I remembered God, and was troubled," and there we find a fact which cannot be accounted for on any other hypothesis than that man and God have broken asunder at some point the one from the other. If all great Biblical doctrines which involve

human experience could be treated in this way, should liberate religious thinking from fanaticism and superstition and bigotry, and should find in the human heart the echo of the divine voice, and in human experience the best commentary ever written upon Biblical history and doctrine.

"I remembered God, and was troubled;" not intellectually, that must always be the case. Asaph* is not speaking of intellectual enigmas; his knife, as we have already seen in his psalm, had cut infinitely deeper than any merely intellectual riddle can ever go. Sir William Hamilton said that if God could be understood he would not be God. Certainly not. If the finite can grasp the infinite it is no longer finite. To be God is to be unknowable, incomprehensible, vaster than the mind seeking to know. Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? Who can by searching find out God? No man hath seen God at any time. God is great, and we know him not. Other subjects deliver themselves up to our inquiry and solicitude, but we make no progress in our penetration of the One Mystery. What we suppose to be progress in that direction is not an outward advance, but an inward chastening and humbling; even the creation of the childlike spirit and the pure heart. Intellectually we make no advance towards God. In every other direction we seem to be climbing high and running far, but towards God, intellectually, we have not advanced one iota. Morally we have; thanks to moral cleansing, to the purification of the heart, to the chastening of the spirit, and to its higher education in spiritual sympathy and in spiritual prayer, we have come nearer God. But the mind has always been kept in its right place—searching, never finding, asking questions of the wind and having its questions carried away, but no reply brought back.

Asaph, then, is not talking about intellectual trouble, he is talking about moral distress. Intellect and Conscience take a very different course in this great matter. Intellect clamorously demands satisfaction; Conscience secretly fears the word of judgment, and would often keep intellect back and ask it to be quiet, and not to knock so loudly upon doors which may open

* See note, *post*, p. 270.

and cause a Presence to appear that would affright the inquirer. Intellect says, Where is God? Conscience desires that the question may never be answered. Wrong always fears Right. We may take that as part of the common law of the universe. Guilt does not want to be discovered by being brought into visible contrast with Innocence. Guilt is bold in its own den, quite heroic indeed, when goading and leading its own vile kin to some blacker outrage; but the moment it sees Purity, it blinks and retires like an owl in sudden sunlight. "Conscience makes cowards of us all." No bad man can think of God and be comfortable. It is the one thought which he is anxious to avoid. Spare him that, and his wickedness will become his happiness.

Look a little closer into the matter. This moral dread of God is the highest tribute that can be paid to the Almighty; when it is felt by the evildoer, such dread is itself a kind of worship. When we publicly say, "Let us worship God," many join in that act who are not nominally included in it. When a bad man thinks he has found a darkness so dense that surely even God's eye cannot pierce it, that sevenfold night is itself a kind of altar at which Guilt offers its reluctant homage to Holiness. When you want to do some bad deed in secret, in the very act of avoiding God you unconsciously worship him! Why fear the law? Why fear the noontide of light? Why not rejoice in the whitening east, and wait till the whole firmament gleams with ineffable splendour, in order to go forth and work out all the purpose of your life? It is because some things must not see the light. We love darkness rather than light only because our deeds are evil. How should the bad man know that the night is the black church in which he worships the God he fears. Thus God maketh the wrath of man to praise him; thus hell itself is a kind of annex of heaven; thus believing and trembling devils offer a negative worship, where they have refused a positive allegiance. The fact that bad men are troubled when they think about God, that they fear God and would expel him from their thoughts, should stimulate good men the more emphatically and constantly to proclaim the existence of God. Tell the tyrant that there is no God, and he throws down his whip of cords that he may take up a scourge of scorpions. Tell the base and cruel man that

there is no White Throne, no Judge, no hereafter, no responsibility—in a word, no God, and he redoubles his baseness, and adds a keener accent to his cruelty, and rejoices with a wilder glee in the agony of his victims. Tell the sufferer that there is no God, and he ceases to be a martyr, and is only a murdered man. Tell him that God and the angels are waiting for his liberated spirit, and he feels not stoning, nor fire, nor sword, nor saw, for his spirit is already in the light. When you proclaim atheism, you are not proclaiming a merely metaphysical theory which men may hold or not hold apart from moral consequences. When you declare atheism, you say practically to the tyrant, “You have nothing to fear, strength wins, the race is to the swift, take what you can, there is no law hereafter, you see everything, carry out your own will.” Any theory that would say that to man, knowing man to be what he is—the savagest of beasts—is a vile theory, is a licentious theory, a diabolical theory. Do not treat atheism as one answer, amongst many, to the problem of the universe. Atheism has a moral side, and on that moral side it says that “you are only limited by social considerations. Science is Providence, the Magistrate is God, the prison is hell, you see everything, there is nothing more beyond the visual line.” We know, of course, that we may be referred to sundry suggestions about social prudence, and personal preservation, and the fear of society, and the dread of public contempt, but we feel that all these suggestions placed side by side with the great thought that life is a probation and there is a judgment to come, cease to demand or deserve respect, and call down our most vehement denunciation and contempt.

This dislike of God is the true secret of aversion to divine things. If the Church were a lyceum in which we could discuss upon equal terms, we might come now and then to talk things over and exchange notions. If the Bible were one volume of five hundred of equal authority we might now and then condescend to look into it, and to compare it with other volumes and pass an opinion upon it and so conclude the case. But God has revealed in the Bible and embodied in Christ means—righteousness, holiness, truth in the inward parts, sincerity in the soul, right balances, right measures; it is a moral word. It involves a

moral claim, it applies a moral law. We need not wonder that men should have sometimes felt inclined to give up certain theological conceptions; it would be a fortune to some men if they could give up God, they could steal more—they could steal with both hands. They could lie more eloquently. Now there is an ugly halt in their lying, it drags and pitches to and fro, here and there; but if they could get rid of God, they could lie with oily fluency; they could smile at the man whom they were deceiving by their falsehoods; but the consciousness that God sees, hears, and will at last judge, has at least a deterrent effect upon such audacity. If you, therefore, ask of me great charity in relation to atheists, and to say to them, "Of course you are honest doubters, intellectual inquirers, you are groping in the dark, and I hope you will one day find the light," I decline the opportunity to show the base charity. God, to me, is not a metaphysical quantity, he is not part of some philosophical conception and argument, he is Law, Righteousness, Justice! When the bad man has his foot upon me I can cry to the watching One to bear me witness and to take my part, and I can refer my case to his arbitrament and leave my vengeance with him. Understand, therefore, that whilst loving charity, and welcoming the sweet-faced, bright-eyed angel always, and standing in her presence with uncovered head, and hailing her as heaven's chiefest beauty, I cannot, in her name, say to the atheist, "You are as good as any other man." I distrust the man, and hate his doctrine. Did not bad people sometimes come round Jesus Christ? Yes, they sometimes came intellectually to him, but not sympathetically. Did not bad people often come to Christ? Yes, penitently when not intellectually. They came because they could cry in his presence, and they were not ashamed to let him see their tears. They never cried in the presence of the priest, they never shed tears under the gaze of the haughty Pharisee; but, somehow, Christ gives to the very worst of us a chance of crying, and such tears seem to cleanse the very beast. We are at least the lighter in spirit after such penitential tears. If you want to know Christ's relation to evil-doers, hear what the devils said. When they saw him, they cried out, "Art thou come to trouble us before the time? What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus, Son of God?" The light that struck them, shot them through and through, punctured

them as with spears and arrows, and hell cried with pain. But as for bad people like ourselves—we could go quite up to him and stand at least behind him, and touch the hem of his garment, and if he caught us, it were heaven upon heaven, for if the touch healed us, the look would give us immortality. Oh, thou worst of men, poor, shattered one, come penitently—hard, intellectual man, Christ has nothing to say to thee, he will treat thee as a conjuring-loving Herod, and will not do any miracle in thy sight. But oh, prodigal heart, wayward, wilful—wilful sinning man, come and say to Christ, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” and he will perform the sublimest of his miracles—the giving of a new heart!

NOTE.

PSALMS OF ASAPH.—The Psalms of Asaph (whatever be the exact meaning of the title) have certainly marked characteristics of their own. They use the general name *Elohim*, instead of the deeper and more awful name Jehovah. They dwell especially (see Ps. lxxvii. 15; lxxx. 5; lxxx. 1) on “Joseph” and Israel, as distinct from Judah, and in the last case on “Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasses,” the tribes of the western camp in the wilderness, close to which the Gershonite Levites pitched (see Num. ii. 18-24; iii. 23); and in Ps. lxxviii. 67, 68 on the transference of the supremacy from Ephraim to Judah. They seem to have a meditative and thoughtful cast; as in Ps. lxxiii., putting before us the great problem of God’s moral government, which forms the subject of the Book of Job; and in the grand Psalm l., urging the true spirituality of sacrifice and of covenant with God. They have frequently a national character, of lamentation in Ps. lxxiv., lxxix., lxxx., of triumph in Ps. lxxv., lxxvi., lxxx. One is the first great historical psalm (Ps. lxxviii.), surveying the story of Israel from the Exodus to the choice of David. Similarly Ps. lxxxiii., in prayer against a confederacy of enemies, chronicles God’s deliverance from Sisera and from Midian in the ancient days of Gideon. Another is a grave didactic admonition (Ps. lxxxii.) to the judges of Israel. If they have not the depth and vigour of the Psalms of David, they suit well the grave authoritative character of the chief of the Levites and “the seer.”—BISHOP BARRY.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou hast led the blind by a way that they know not, but thou hast led them to peace and security and joy. All men are blind with regard to the future ; it is as if we had no vision at all ; we may not boast of to-morrow, because we know not what one day may bring forth. We know the history of the day that is gone, but what is coming in the morning not the wisest man can tell. Thou keepest to-morrow in thine own hand ; but this we know, that we shall be led and upheld and comforted ; our perplexity shall be relieved, the crooked places shall be made straight, the rough places plain, and even the valleys shall be exalted ; a new song will be in our mouth at the close of the day ; if we have to sing of judgment we shall also have to sing of mercy, for thy way towards us is one of judgment and of love. If thou dost criticise us, it is that we may be amended ; if thou dost smite us and wound us, it is that we may be healed with an immortal healing. Help us to believe this ; deliver us from the folly of thinking that life is chance, a game of fortune, a conjuror's trick ; give us to feel that life is a divine philosophy, a wondrous plan, having relation in the individual to all other individuals, so that we are a commonwealth, a brotherhood, one great family, part of us in heaven, part on earth, but still claiming the same Father, walking by the same law, and looking forward to the same glorious destiny. Wherein we have been frivolous and foolish, the Lord pity us, for we are often the sport of the wind, and are driven before it like dry leaves ; wherein we have said, This shall be as we wish it, the Lord pardon us, for our conceit is often profane. Enable us henceforward to have no will but thine, never to consult ourselves except in the spirit of the sanctuary ; then shall wisdom be given to us, the eternal lamp, the glory from on high, and at night-time we shall walk in splendour, and the light of the noontide shall be sevenfold. We have taken our life into our own hand, and we are ashamed of the issue ; whenever we have given ourselves to thee for government, inspiration, direction, comfort, healing, behold at eventime we have been filled with a new and rapturous gladness. Pity us wherein our lives are hard ; the gates are many, and the keys are lost ; the roads are steep, and the wind is bleak, and the clouds are full of threatening, and there is no voice of music in the air,—the Lord help us in that day of sevenfold gloom ; when the house is bare, empty, silent, the loved ones all out, or gone, or dead, when we hear nothing but the awful stillness, the Lord cause us to hear his own going in that wilderness ; and wherein the future is troubled, without certainty of sign or token, so that we know not whether to go to the right hand or to the left, help us to stand still like men who are expecting a voice from heaven. This we are enabled

to say, because we have been with Jesus and learned of him. Until we knew him we knew nothing of this prayer; we were always seeking for solutions of the enigma of life, and always thinking we had found them; sometimes we cast ourselves into the darkness of despair, and said, Let come what will come, it can bring with it nothing but death and annihilation; but now we have seen the Cross, we have communed with the Son of God, we have known somewhat of the mystery of his priesthood; we see the Father above all things, ruling, reigning, governing, shaping, and directing all life; so we are happy, yea, glad, we are strong, and our security is so complete that we have perfect peace. Praised be the Triune God for this ineffable joy! Amen.

Psalm lxxviii. 14.

"In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire."

DAY AND NIGHT LEADING.

DID some man imagine this? I thank him. Life is the sweeter for having such men among us. What a man it was that thought of this condescension and love on the part of the miracle-working God described in this most musical psalm! It was worth being born to imagine this conception of God. It is so tender, so fatherlike, so comforting; it is charged to the full with inspiration of the best kind; it makes all things feel securer; it brings to the soul contributions from all quarters, contributions that increase its wealth, that improve its quality, that inspire its courage. Are we, then, face to face with a poem? so be it: the society is good; the touch of this man has healing in it,—“In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.” Can men imagine such history as that without anything to go upon, without a germ to start with? Why we are told the universe began with a puff of smoke, and was whirled into its present rotundity and glory by persistent force; but this man had nothing to go by. His conception of God is a greater miracle than the creation of the universe itself, even according to the suggestions of physical science—for there is no providence, no father, no rhythm of movement, in all the great action of life; it is a tumble, a scramble, a fierce on-rush, a phenomenon of madness. Yet this man dreamed one night that God in the daytime led his people with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. Thank God for such a vision: it brings with it its own authority; its music is its inspiration, its comfort is its

indisputable credential. We may linger in the society of this poet; he may prove to be a prophet.

A startling statement that people were led in the daytime. Surely there is no need for leadership in the season of light. When all the heaven is aflame with glory, every man surely can lead himself. The audacity of the statement begets some interest in the speaker. An irony of this kind could only be uttered by a very great man, or by a very small one. Who needs a guide in the daytime? What man does not undertake to do all he has to do when the light is plentiful? It would seem to be wholly unnecessary to have leadership when the sun is at the zenith, or when he is climbing to it, or when he is descending from it. Surely the sun is an opportunity, and an inspiration, and a sufficiency. We might talk so with regard to all the outgoing and experiment and adventure of life. Man has reason. He says he can put things together. He claims what he calls a power of inference; he can set events in a line, mass them, redistribute them, interrogate them, and draw out of them what he calls conclusions. All this is done by virtue of the reasoning faculty—that distinguishing token of man, that sign-manual of semi-divinity. What need, therefore, has reason for being led? Reason says, I am leader, not led. Not only has man reason, he has experience. He claims to know what he is about. He bristles up into a kind of Papal conceit of infallibility when he says, I know what has happened, and therefore I can tell practically what is about to occur, and yesterday shall be the teacher of to-day and the hint of to-morrow. There is sound sense in that. Reason certainly has a great function to perform; experience ought not to be lost upon men; history ought to have something to say at the council-table of every man, in the family, and in the counting-house, and on the high-road. This is all admitted. Then some men have peculiar natural sense, nous, gumption, sagacity. In a moment they can say, That is not the road; this is a mistake; that ought not to have been done; the right way lies elsewhere. Generally, they are right. They are what may be called, and justly, strong-minded men. Can they not be left to go out by themselves, to find out all the rest when they have found out so much? Does it not “stand to reason” that in the

daytime men do not require to be led? Then again there is that great school which is denominated human society. Men help one another. Men learn from one another. The mistakes of others ought to be warnings to those who look on. When men fall in the way those who follow should beware lest they too come to the same pitfall. Here, then, we have reason, experience, natural sagacity, human society, a thousand other ministries all operating in the daytime: what need have we for divinity, supernaturalness, providence,—that higher rule which is called divine? A very proper question, admitting of a very satisfactory reply. It is in the daytime men go most astray. Very few people go astray at night. There is a natural fear, which becomes a natural caution and restriction of liberty, and men say they had better wait until the light comes before they go out on any adventure. How tempting is the daylight; we had not thought of it so before, but it is in reality an infinite temptation. We can see so far, we can comprehend so much; we can see where the river goes down, down, down, and turns round into mystery. Let us pursue the fluent line! The whole horizon seems to be set with spectres that tempt men away over swamp and bog, and hill and dale, and through wood and water, and then we begin to realise what it is that has taken us from home as we grasp the mocking cloud. Now we think of it, it is really in the “daytime” that men make fools of themselves, by outwitting their own sagacity, and by following things that have no reality and that will not condescend to be appropriated to individual uses. How well it would have been for some men had there been no daylight! How much there is in that daylight to excite the spirit of adventure! Yet, properly used, it is the very blessing of God, the great opportunity of life,—so nearly do death and life lie together. There never can be but a step between life and death. When we say that death is a long way off, we say what we do not know. Death can never be far away in any mortal state. God led his people in the daytime with a cloud. It required a poet to think of that. It is just the thing for leadership—a wraith, a spectre, half-thought, half-thing, almost alive, taking up no room, or taking up so little as to leave space enough for those who want it: and there it goes! A man must have sharp eyes to see some clouds,—they are so thin, so vaporous, almost invisible, but always there, and when moving

always moving in the right direction. We look for earthquakes, and report them; we tell all the tragedy of the volcano—how it rumbled, and heaved, and burst, and spit its infinite lava; we are fond of emphasis: but what is leading life in the daytime is but a cloud. It requires to be watched, yea, looked for; its very thinness is part of its religious influence; it may move so noiselessly that unless we keep our whole attention fixed we may miss the movement, and be left without guide or sign or token or help in the infinite wilderness. Never let it be said, Thy servant was busy here and there, and the cloud passed without notice. "Busy here and there?" no; a man can never be busy both here and there: he is ruined by the division of the places. A man can only be busy either here or there. We cannot serve God and mammon. The very cloudiness of the revelation of providence is a religious appeal, and ought to awaken religious vigilance and keep us on the alert, for at any moment, without blast of trumpet, the cloud may arise and move. Ye can discern the face of the sky: how is it ye cannot discern the signs of the times? God has other monitors than earthquakes. Oftentimes he is not in the great wind at all; he comes through the medium of a still small voice, and whispers eternity into the trembling heart. Blessed are they that watch and wait and hope. No life need be without guidance. We must restrain impetuosity, and self-will, and defiance, which spoils everything, and be quiet, solemn, expectant. "He that believeth shall not make haste;" "in your patience possess ye your souls." Lose self-control, and the battle is lost also. The quiet waiting man always wins,—in religious phraseology, is brought to his desired haven, and is blessed with an abundance of benediction. Never imagine, then, that in the daytime men need no leadership. Men may boast and least suspect themselves when they are conscious of their own ability. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." When a man says he is perfectly equal to the occasion, he knows every enemy and every difficulty on the road, and desires to be let alone; watch him, for you will see him no more. Fools are crowned and beheaded on the same day.

Even the night need not shut out the light of God,—*"all the night"* he led them *"with a light of fire."* There must be night.

That is strange, but true. There must be darkness. Why cannot we always have holiday, festival, noontide? Why not have an infinite monotony of glory? If we close the Bible, we do not alter the facts of life. Better keep the Bible at hand as the deepest and wisest interpreter of all the mystery of existence. As we have before seen, it shirks nothing. This is no book with dainty fingers that will only touch dainty things. It blurts out the whole truth about everything. It stands up sometimes and talks so loudly and frankly that we shut our ears lest people should overhear who will only by their presence excite our shame. It goes up to the greatest questions, and solves them. It takes up little children and kisses them, and sets them down again to grow into men. It says to sorrow, What is the meaning of these red eyes and stained cheeks? Come near me, poor weeper, and rest awhile; I will give thee a new chance in life. The Bible comes into the night of our experience, and says, I will set it with stars all over, so that there shall not be room to put another diamond in all the coronal; and as for this cold night, I will light a fire—not a crackling flame, but a glowing fire—and the darkness shall make it the more precious. How providence adapts its communications to circumstances! A cloud would have been no use at night; a fire would have been wholly out of keeping with the poetry of daylight. Providence knows what is best. The fitness of things is a religious argument. It would be a marvellous thing for any man to take up an alphabet, ten thousand alphabets, and to shake them out of a sack so that they would fall into *Paradise Lost*. Yet *Paradise Lost* is nothing but an arrangement of the alphabet. I am not aware that that miracle has ever been performed. So it is an infinite marvel that life in all its activities, impulses, selfishness, goodness, badness, tragedy, comedy, should be but so many unrelated pieces all shaken down out of heaven into human history. No. There is a shaping Hand about. There is a Spirit somewhere. What is my proof of the existence of God? My own lifetime, that is a tract I never bought, and cannot sell, and the more I read it the more I pray.

Providence brings with it not only a light at night-time, but “a light of fire.” It might have been another light, but it would not

have fitted all the occasion with so exquisite an adaptation. The night is cold, so the light is of fire. Other light may glare and dazzle, gleam upon the eyes so as to hurt the vision, but oh! there are two comforts in the household fire—the warmth and the light; not a light that could be seen afar, but a light just adapted to the next step or two—and so warm, it makes the house. There can be no house in the winter unless the fire is lighted. Even the library looks a more living library the moment you apply a match to the fuel in the grate; the fire and the books seem to know one another, seem to have been waiting for one another, and all the authors say, Now is our opportunity; let us confer and grow wise. And the fire is the crown of the winter. It is the very centre and joy of our Christmas festivity. However far you stray away in the snow it is the fire in the house that is getting ready for you the very delight of your enjoyment. Thus providence adapts its communications: here it is a book, there it is a conscience, yonder it is both; here an infinite civilisation, and yonder a barbarism that is waiting, struggling with its men, hardly knowing which is upward, which is downward, which is right, which left, but still working out its own grim problem. Could the world do without its barbarism any more than the earth could do without its sea? There is more water than land on what we call the earth. There may be more barbarism than civilisation, there may be more wickedness than goodness, there may be more desert than garden; and it is not for us to explain why these things should be or how they came to be; the counsel is in heaven, and we are living from without and from above, and by-and-by we shall be called in to hear how it all came to pass, and how the very darkness was made into a temple, how the very wilderness was needful for the culture of our life, and how our necessity was one of our chief riches. How regularly the day comes, how regularly the night; how regularly, therefore, the cloud and the pillar of glowing illuminating fire! But monotony itself need not be oppressive. Life is monotonous, and yet we could not give up the monotony. We could not give up our daily bread—bread in the literal sense. What must go if we economise? The luxury, the rich wine, the dainty confection: now let the bread go!—no! never! The bread must stop, whatever goes. No man begins

by throwing the bread out, and keeping the confectionery. There is a great lesson here for the culture that is higher than the sustenance and training of the body. Jesus Christ described himself as "bread,"—not as some luxury invented by highest skill ; he called himself "water,"—not some liqueur compounded by cunning fingers as the expression of a mind which alone held the secret of the concoction. Said Jesus Christ, "I am the bread of life." Blessed Christ, that was divine. No other man could have dreamed of saying that. How true it is, and gracious ! Said he, "I am the water of life." Now we think of it, that simplicity is its own deity. Had he said, I am juice wrung out of rarest roots in places untrodden by human feet, and the price of the nectar is very high, we should have called him a dealer in nostrums, an empiric, a fraud ; but coming closely to us, and saying, "I am the bread of life. . . . I am the water of life. . . . I am a cloud in the daytime. . . . I am a fire at night," he speaks our native language, works along the line of our conscious necessity, offers us the things we cannot do without. Men tire of luxury,—men never tire of bread : men tire of inventions and philosophies and new religions and fine experiments, but there stands ready for renewal of intercourse and love the blessed gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Sometimes it has to stand back, and it can bear the affront. It is divine, because it can bear to be insulted. You never know whether a man is a Christian or not until you have insulted him. You cannot tell a Christian by his confession, his words, his creed. Many a man would sign a creed a mile long if it would serve his purpose. You know what he is when you have struck him in his weakest point. Jesus Christ bears affronts, bears neglect, waits to be recognised, says, They will come again ; they are going away to-day, and leave me, because some dreamer has thrown a spell upon them ; but they will come back again to-morrow or on the third day, and I will keep the door ajar ; I would not for the world they should think I had gone too : the time will come when I must go ; but I will let the last moment throb out before I turn my back upon the world I have redeemed. Many men have gone away, leading themselves by day and by night, saying they have no need of the supernatural and no need of a guiding providence, and they will take result whatever it be. A few

days' hunger will work miracles upon them. Do not run after them too soon. Nothing brings a man to his senses so soon as having nothing to eat. A week's hunger has a marvellous influence upon the temper. Starvation leads a man to alter his estimate of food. He who went out an overfed glutton, finding fault with everything, will after a month's absolute starvation be the easiest man to please in all the world. So it shall be in mental hunger, in spiritual desire. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Blessed famine, gaunt teacher, grim, ghastly monitor, come! for some dainty, overfed, pampered epicures have turned away from the living God, and are making little divinities of stone and wood and gold and silver. Bring them home again, thou gauntest Leader sent from God. If, then, provision has been made for our leadership in the daytime and in the night-time, our course is clear. We must accept the divinity that shapes our ends. We shall be more conscious of it the less conscious we are of ourselves. What is the name of that action by which a man projects himself out of words? Faith. It is not only a theological term, it is a most practical word; it indicates the supreme effort of life, that marvellous leap which finds its life in eternity, its springs, upper and nether, in God. He pleases God who has most faith. Without faith it is impossible to please him. We walk by faith, not by sight. Faith is not indolence. Faith is not fatalism. Faith is not a languid acceptance of whatever may occur. Faith is a burning power, a tremendous energy, an infinite self-control, a trust that says, "God cannot lie."

PRAYER.

LORD, evermore give us the bread of life, which cometh down from heaven. Thou hast created this hunger, and thou wilt satisfy it. Thou only canst give us what we need. Every good gift is thine, and every perfect gift; and thou givest unto thy children that which will make them still more thine, because under its nutriment they will grow up into manhood, into beauty, into all nobleness: Lord, evermore give us this bread! We labour for the meat which perisheth; we would labour more for the bread which endureth unto everlasting life. Herein is wisdom, true sagacity, and a right acceptance of the mystery of life. May we be found wise in these matters, and not fools. Let the time past more than suffice wherein we have wrought folly and wickedness, and may we rise betimes, a great while before it is day, that we may be ready to employ all the light thou givest unto us in doing good. If we have these desires, we can trace them to thyself. Once we knew nothing of their inspiration and their passion; but thou hast come down upon us with a mighty and gracious power, and now we are the sons of God,—not that we have already attained, neither are already perfect, but in our desire, our aspiration, our supreme wish, we are even now in heaven. For such miracles we bless the almightiness of God, but most we bless the all-compassion of his heart. When we were yet sinners Christ died for us; he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. We would eat his flesh and drink his blood that we may have life abiding in us. This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. Jesus came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly, as in wave upon wave when the sea is blown with a great wind. May we not be partially alive, but wholly, living through and through, body, soul, and spirit, having no faculty of slumber, but every desire of the soul purified and ennobled, and in beneficent action: thus shall our life be a daily sacrifice; we shall live and move and have our being in God, and shall be borne above all that is of the nature of cloud and fear and doubt and tempest; thus shall we be in heaven whilst yet we are travelling and toiling upon the earth. Our souls desire the bread of life, corn from heaven, angels' bread; we would eat and drink abundantly at the Lord's banqueting table, whilst his banner over us is love: there would we quench our desires in ineffable satisfaction, there would we abound unto God's glory because of our eloquent thankfulness. Help us to believe that what we take at thy table is meant to be used in nobler strength for the good of men; thus may the bread we eat, which is sent down from heaven, be turned into all manly and useful conduct, so that our strength itself may be offered in sacrifice unto God. Guide us with thine eye; hold us in the

hollow of thine hand ; may we feel that we are precious unto thee in Christ Jesus thy Son. These great revelations thou hast made to us whilst we lingered at the Cross. If at first we did not understand thy love, thou didst not chide us with great judgments ; thou wast patient with us, thou didst continue to teach us, and instruct us, and lead us by a way that we knew not, and when we began to see the meaning of Jesus Christ's love then we were glad as men who see a great light. Confirm thy people in their most holy faith, building and stablishing them in all strength, and comforting them with all needful encouragement. Thus shall thy Church glorify thyself, and thou, Son of God, shall be incarnated again, in the spirit and conduct of thy followers. When life is hard with us, be near our side ; when reason is shocked and almost affrighted from her throne, do thou give steadiness to the mind ; when we have done wrong and have felt the sting of hell in the heart, may we not be swallowed up of despair, but may some evangel come to us, some sweet music-note from heaven, that will tell us that even the worst may die with Christ and rise again. Save us all. May no wanderer be lost ; may the least likely be set in the front, that so being urged by those behind and nourished and comforted we may be brought safely home. Make the sick-chamber a church ; make the lonely sea a temple of thy revelation for those who are tossed thereon ; make the far-away land burn with somewhat of the sacredness of home when the Sabbath dawns upon its solitude ; and bring us, up high hills, or across angry waves or through burning deserts, or by blooming garden paths,—as thou wilt, but bring us altogether at last, into Christ's presence, that we may serve Christ's crown. Amen.

Psalm lxxviii. 25.

"Man did eat angels' food."

ANGELS' FOOD.

THE reference, of course, is to the manna which fell in the wilderness ; and there many people might be content to leave the whole case. We soon tell by our appearance what food we have been eating. You cannot hide the bill of fare. The face is a tell-tale. The more the sensualist eats the greater a sensualist he appears to be. He feeds the flesh. He gets coarser every day ; what little music there was in his voice is all dead and gone ; he has choked it with the food of beasts. Once there was a little child in him, well spoken of, thought to be the germ of a fine man ; but that child-angel is dead. Every mouthful of meat the man now takes makes him more beast-like. You may eat out of the very basin with Christ, but if you eat with an Iscariot's digestion, it will turn into devil. Say not that it is of no consequence what a man eats. It is of vital consequence.

The mystery, however, is this, that even the best food may be turned into evil nutriment, according to the nature of the man who partakes of it. All God's wheatfields are lost upon some natures. They would seem to have put themselves beyond the range of God's almightiness. What we take we turn into our own nature. The lion grows as a lion the more he eats; though it be of the daintiest food it all becomes lion. So with us bodily, intellectually, spiritually: we tell what our food is. The glutton grows flesh: call him successful when the beast can grow no more; hang his prize on his neck and let him lie down, a specimen of brutish nature. The poet turns his food into poetry; the suppliant at God's throne takes his food and becomes a more eloquent intercessor. The nature determines everything. Herein is a great mystery of nature, of physiology, of moral purposes controlling physical appetences, of spiritual inspiration subduing everything to its own design. Yet there stands the law, that we turn whatever we appropriate into our own nature—the lion into lion, the wolf into wolf, the angel into angel, the poet into poet. Blame not in all cases the food; there are instances in which it is to be blamed: but how much depends upon the nature! how mysterious are the processes of assimilation! Our intellectual food determines our intellectual quality. We can tell what books a man has been reading by his conversation. Why ask a catalogue from the student? Simply listen to him; the catalogue is of no use. He may have gone through all the books, and they have left no impression upon him; he must be judged by his intellectual quality, bulk, force, aptitude; there need be no doubt whatever as to the process through which he has passed; your examination may be a farce; the man tells his own tale by the first sentence he utters, by the first question he propounds. If we keep companionship with wise men we grow wiser if we profit by the opportunities which have been put within our reach: we may be the more foolish, because our companionship may have been used to feed our vanity; it may have been so used as but to enable us to tell others on what a ladder we have climbed, how we have simply climbed into nothing. But the rule taken in its natural operation ought to stand thus: That the companion of the wise shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. We cannot

now, supposing ourselves to have profited by our study and experience, read the books we were wont to read many years ago. Is there a more interesting exercise within its own limits than to take up the books that used to charm us? What has occurred? Nothing in the books themselves; they are just what they always were: why, then, not revive old delights? Why not re-enter into old enthusiasms regarding them? A change has taken place in the reader. Now he knows what was meant by the man who said: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Yet the things are useful in their own time. There is a contempt that is ungrateful. The boy needed one kind of food, and the man requires another. How foolish it is for persons to suppose that they must always remain at the same point, with the same elections, and the same aversions, and must never change! That is not progress; that is fatuity, insanity. There be those who say that such-and-such persons were wont to be content with such-and-such things, therefore they ought still to be content with them. That is an insult to the genius of progress. Once you were quite content to lie in the little cradle: why do you not lie there now? That is what you were used to: why do you claim any larger accommodation? Remember your beginnings, and go back to your cradle! Once you were content with little painted toys, they amused you by the hour: what do you now want with painted picture, and poem in stone, and great castle, and an environment marked all round with what used to be considered luxury? Why did you not carry your toys in your pocket that you may amuse yourself down to old age? How we used to be delighted then with certain books! They were enough for us, they just touched our terminal line; they were a little above us, still we could avail ourselves of their suggestion, and we thought ourselves philosophers because we understood them in some degree: now we smile at the couplets that used to make us wild with joy, and turn away from the men who charmed us like magicians, asking for some, it may be, ruder, sterner, directer stuff, that touches the life in its pain, that thrusts a spear in the blood, and makes us plunge forward with fiery eagerness towards some further goal. Milk for babes, strong meat for men, angels' corn for those who can appropriate

and assimilate celestial food. Grow in grace : ask for larger supplies of the best material, the material upon which you can feed the soul, nourish it and strengthen it, enlarging its capacities, and qualifying it for the ready and useful discharge of all the functions and responsibilities of life.

Our intellectual food tells upon our face. You can tell when a man has been neglecting reading ; you can tell when a man has been a diligent student—not by formal beauty, over which he has no control, but by expression, and radiance, and force, and quality, not always to be described in words ; you feel that he has been eating with the prophets, and he has been finding nutriment in corn from heaven. There is no deception about this matter. They who have eyes made to see, and that are sharpened by keen uses, can tell every new wrinkle that comes into a familiar face, and can see where light begins to dawn upon the flesh and almost transfigure it into spirit. If this be so intellectually, it is infinitely more so religiously. Men speak about falling from grace as if it were some mysterious process : what is easier to detect than that a man has gone down in the spirituality of his tone ? At first you cannot quite understand the change, because you think it impossible that such a man can have abridged his prayers, slurred over his sacrifices, waited perfunctorily at the altar ; you will not allow the heart of trust to suspect a betrayal of the Lord ; yet the talk is very different, the estimate of things is quite changed, the outlook is no longer vast, but is a prison of clouds, a line of encroaching night : what is the reason of this ? The man has not been praying seven times a day ; if he has been praying the number of times, his window has not been opened in the right direction ; if he has been through the ceremony, he has omitted the sacrifice ; if he has used the words, he has lost the blood. Only blood is accepted in heaven. Is that to be understood in some merely literal sense ? Then indeed it had better not be understood. It is to be understood in the sense that nothing is accepted of God that does not carry with it life, fire, consecration, absolute love,—that is blood ; all else is a foul and detestable offering. Hence, it becomes comparatively easy to tell when a man has not been eating angels' food, or walking on the right levels, or keeping up his commerce

with heaven ; for now any frivolity will satisfy him ; the fool easily laughs, the empty nature is soon filled ; but the immortal disdains the table of mortality. We are all eating, we are always eating ; all life is a process of absorption, appropriation, assimilation. Eating, sleeping, praying, doing business, conducting all the processes of life, we are appropriating all the time, and what we do will reveal itself in the poet's eye, or in the beast's vacancy.

Under what circumstances may men be said to eat angels' food, corn of heaven, bread sent down from God ? When earth cannot satisfy him any longer, the good food is beginning to tell upon him. Earth was enough for a long time ; it was called "the great globe," and men passed up and down rebuking the dreamers who called the earth a vale of tears, a land of shadows, a garden of graves ; but little by little, imperceptibly as to the advance of time, man began to feel that he had not standing-ground enough here ; he said, This world is not so great as I was told it was : what is the measure of things in their totality ? What are these lights that gleam upon me from on high ? Are they flecks of amber which some cunning hand has set there to be gazed at ? or are they golden portals that fall back upon infinite palaces ? I feel as if I must go up there, as if I had some rights of property there, as if there I could understand the language, and begin the life of the place at once. Why lift up your eyes on high ? Why not look below you ? Because there is nothing to see below me. This poor little earth has but its transient opportunities, and if it be vigilant and faithful it may grow a little in the summer-time, and then want a whole winter's repose for the poor little effort which it put forth in the middle of the year : things here only grow in handfuls : I feel as if yonder "infinite day excludes the night, and pleasures banish pain."

What has a man been doing who talks thus ecstatically ? He has been eating angels' food, and he is growing angel-like ; already he is more in heaven than on earth ; the food is telling upon him. A man may be said to eat angels' food when he grows in spirituality. You can no longer deceive him by the letter, or limit him by the narrow dogma ; he says, All these things are

beginnings, alphabets, hints, dawns ; but yonder is the meaning of it all : I seek a country out of sight ; I will not have your land flowing with milk and honey, a little Canaan that could be measured by field-surveyors ; I pant, I yearn, for a land far off, infinite as God's infinity : meanwhile, being here, I will do the day's work, not with a hireling's industry, but with the consecration of one who is anointed from on high ; this work shall not be spoiled because of its littleness, but done with all the patience and care and hopefulness of love : yet all the while I will feel that I would not do this little work in this little space, but for what lies beyond : an eternal impulse makes me do the temporal service. Growing in spirituality is not a metaphysical process ; it is concrete, intelligible, patent to the observation ; it is not a growth in mere sentiment, it is not an enrichment of the nature in mere foam of ecstasy and rapture : it is a larger outlook, a firmer grasp of things eternal, a clearer view of distant things ; it is a growth in preparation, in the estimate of relative values, in sympathy with God. Growing so, the whole world changes ; its duties become light, its burdens become comparatively easy, its wealth a handful of dust that may be thrown up and caught again and laid down with a conjuror's ease. Growth in spirituality means larger intercourse with God, keener perception of religious essences and moral affinities. Growth in spirituality means a throwing-off of mere burdensomeness and ceremony and ritual ; a forsaking of the fleshpots of Egypt, and a yearning for the society of angels and spirits, blessed and immortal. There is no immodesty in claiming that there may be direct consciousness of these things. Where there could be any boasting about them that very boasting would destroy the reality of the claim. The nearer a man comes to God the more he says, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Moses did not grow in pious frivolity when he grew in intimacy with God. Now and again a man, or two might follow him up the mountains so far ; but there is a point on the mountains of God where every man must break off from every other man, and go up alone. How high the hill, how solemn the silence, how infinite the outlook ! Does the mountain tremble under the man's feet ? Is heaven coming down upon him like a burden to crush him ? Is the air peopled with innumerable spirits ? There is no one with

whom to converse, with whom to exchange fears, an exchange that might mitigate the terror ; there is nothing but solitude.

We can now do better than eat angels' food, a larger feast has been prepared for us,—we can eat the body and drink the blood of Christ : “ Our fathers did eat manna in the desert ; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven ; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” When the disciples heard that they felt a new hunger in the soul, and they said, “ Lord, evermore give us this bread.” When Jesus Christ spoke about the water, he made the poor woman at the well thirsty, so that she said, “ Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.” What a way he had of preaching his gospel ! When he said “ bread,” the heart hungered ; when he said “ water,” the soul thirsted,—“ As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” “ Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. . . . I am that bread.” Other men have died, said Christ, whatever they have eaten : “ Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness,” and called it angels' food, “ and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever : and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” This is the table that is spread for the soul's satisfaction to-day. “ Assuredly, assuredly, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. . . . This is that bread which came down from heaven : not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead : he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” They were offended, because they were literalists,

and did not understand such poetry as this. At once they seized the most obvious idea, and thought of actually and literally eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus Christ! but he said: "The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,"—not the words as a doctrine, but the words he was now speaking about flesh and blood: when he said "flesh," he meant truth; when he said "blood," he meant life: when he said "eat my flesh and drink my blood," he said, *Appropriate me, take me, have none other but me.* Into this mystery the soul must enter if it would hold high sacrament. Without a realisation of this mystery, the sacrament becomes but a ceremony, a vain show, an empty ritual. What is it, then, that becomes the true factor in all the sacred emblemism and sacred worship? It is faith. Still faith removes mountains, works miracles, creates and establishes vital transformations. Faith is the soul's life. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Without faith it is impossible to please him. Faith takes the bread, and turns it into the flesh of Christ; faith takes the emblematic wine, and makes it sacrificial blood. All that is outward and literal is but initial and helpful. If we stop there, we are like men who have gone to seek a king, and have halted beside the gate; yea, we may have opened the gate and gone inside, but we have gone no further. The king is not at the gate; the gate but opens upon the palace; we must pass the gate, ascend the road, go higher, and ask for the presence-chamber itself; and if Reason opened the gate, Faith must complete the pilgrimage, and originate the introduction, and secure the exchange of communications. Lord, increase our faith!

Let not the bad man think that he can disguise the processes through which he is conducting his life. Let that be insisted upon. The countenance cannot be made to tell a permanent lie. For a time it may be painted and decorated, for a moment or two a smile may light upon it which may deceive the simple and the unwary; but the countenance, caught at off times, watched narrowly all the day, searched through and through with a seer's eyes, tells at what tavern a man has been drinking, at what

hostelry he has been sleeping, at what table he has been feeding his hunger. The most successful hypocrite can get through but one moment's real deception with wise men. Even the completeness of his mimicry tells against him. He is too successful in his mimetics. Were he to stumble and blunder now and then, such halting might be a tribute to his honesty; but living for the occasion, appealing to the immediate judgment, snatching a prize with a dishonest hand, he will be blown out, and there shall come down upon his candle, already far burnt, one drop of rain from heaven, and with a noise it shall go out and be lighted no more. The triumphing of the hypocrite is short; the candle of the wicked shall be put out, and nothing shall be known of it but an evil odour. There is bread enough in your Father's house: why perish with hunger? Let your hunger prove your manhood; let your necessities prove the divinity of your origin; let that panting for other water, that hunger for other food, which must now and again seize the soul that is not dead, testify to the fact that you were made to be guests of God, that you were meant to be children of the Most High. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved." The Bible is the hospitable book. It is always preparing a table for the hungry, opening fountains in the desert for the thirsty and the weary. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water,"—springing water, water that comes up out of the rock, pure as the crystal river that flows fast by the throne of God. Lord, evermore give us this bread! Lord, evermore give us of this water of life!

Psalm lxxxv. 6.

"Wilt thou not revive us again : that thy people may rejoice in thee ?"

THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

IT is well known that many Christians have come to have a distaste for the word "revival" when used with reference to religious work. To some extent I share that distaste. There has been so much exaggeration, so much fanatical excitement, and so much transient profession, that we cannot wonder at the revulsion which many sober-minded Christians feel when they hear the very word "revival." We believe that all got-up revivals are bad. You cannot organise a true revival; we cannot treat spiritual influences as fixed quantities; as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so, often, is that sudden, profound, and irresistible impulse which rouses the Church, and breaks in beneficently upon the deadly slumber and delusive security of the world. As a matter of fact, there have been extraordinary visitations of divine influence; there have been seasons when the Holy Ghost has made the earthquake, the fire, the rending wind, and the stormy tempest his ministers, and when men have been shaken with a wholesome fear, not knowing the way, yet feeling the nearness of the Lord. There have been great birth-days in the Church, days on which thousands have been crucified with Jesus Christ, and multitudes have begun to sing loudly and lovingly his praise. There have been days of high festival in the sanctuary, when the silver trumpets have sounded, when prodigals have come back to sonship, when shepherds have returned with recovered flocks, when women have found the piece that was lost, and the dead have risen to immortal life. There have, too, been times when the people have realised with special vividness the personality and life-giving power of the Holy Ghost; when they have had the keys of interpretation

wherewith to unlock the boundless treasures of the divine word ; when prayer was as the speech of love that never wearies ; when the Sabbath shed its sacred glory over all the days of the week ; when God's house shone with heavenly lustre, and all life throbbed in joyful harmony with the purposes of God. We refer to these things as to matters of fact, and in doing so we wish to know whether such delights cannot be more permanently secured. At the same time let it be clearly said that we could not bear the strain of an ecstatic life ; we are not constituted for constant rapture ; we have to contend with the deceitfulness of the flesh ; we have to fight and suffer upon the earth when the spirit would gladly escape on the wings of the morning to untroubled and hallowed scenes. Still, there is danger in supposing that because we cannot always live at the highest point of spiritual enthusiasm, we may be content with low attainments, or with a neutrality which attracts no attention to itself. Now there is something between the flame of a blazing ecstasy and the grey ashes of a formal profession ; there is a steady and penetrating glow of piety, there is a fervour of love, there is an animated intelligence, a zealous affection, a godly yearning for personal progress and social evangelisation, which, when found together, make up a life of delight in God and blessed service for men. To promote this realisation we offer a few suggestions of whose value you can quickly form a sound opinion.

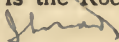
First of all, we are more and more assured that, as individual Christians, and as churches of Jesus Christ, we need to be very clear in our doctrinal foundations. Do let us get a distinct idea of the principal points in the Christian faith. Beginning with the doctrine of sin, let us strive after God's view of it. To him sin is infinitely hateful ; he cannot tolerate it with the least degree of allowance ; it troubles his otherwise perfect and happy universe ; it despoils human nature ; it overthrows all that is divine in manhood ; it calls into existence the worm that gnaws for ever ; it is the cause of death and the source of hell. To under-estimate the heinousness of sin is to put ourselves out of the line of God's view ; to understand sin is to understand redemption. Sin interprets the Cross ; sin shows what is meant by God's love. Have we, as individuals and churches, lost the

true notion of sin? Is it no longer infinitely abominable to us? Is it toned down to something almost indistinguishable? We cannot be right in our relation to Jesus Christ, we cannot be just to his holy Cross, until we regard sin with unutterable repugnance, until we rise against it in fiery indignation, fighting it with all the energy of wounded love, and bringing upon it the condemnation of concentrated and implacable anger. We are not speaking of what are called great sins; nor thinking of murder, of commercial plunder, of adultery, drunkenness, or theft; we are speaking of sin as sin, sin nestling secretly in the heart, sin rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, sin indulged in secret places, sin perverting the thought, sin poisoning the love, sin sucking out the life-blood of the soul; thinking of sin, not of sins—of the fact, not of the details; we ask, with passionate yet well-considered pointedness, Have we not been led to underestimate the guilt of sin?

Out of a true knowledge of sin will come a true appreciation of Jesus Christ as the Saviour. Apart from this, he will be a strange teacher; with it, he will be the Redeemer for whom our hearts have unconsciously longed when they have felt the soreness and agony of sin. We could sum up the Christian creed in a sentence, yet that sentence contains more than all the libraries in the world. The short but all-including creed,—the faith which bears us up above all temptation and all controversy, the faith in which we destroy the power of the world, and soar into the brightness of eternal day,—is this: I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God! The heart hungers for him, our sin cries out for his mercy, our sorrow yearns for his coming, and when he does come he speaks just the word that the soul needs; he understands us; he knows us altogether; he can get down into the low, dark pit into which sin has thrown us; he draws us to his Cross; he hides our sins in his sacrifice; he shows us how God can be honoured, yet the sinner forgiven; he destroys the devil, and puts within us the Holy Ghost; he so fills us with life that death has no longer any terror with which to affright us. I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; his word is the best witness of its own power; it touches life at every point; it is most precious when most needed; it goes into our business, and

lays down the golden rule ; it follows us in our wanderings, and bids us return ; it is always pure, noble, unselfish, unworldly ; it gives us a staff for the journey, a sword for the battle, a shelter from the storm, and in the last darkening hour it gives us the triumph of immortality. This is the witness of ten thousand times ten thousand histories. We do not wonder at worldly or dead-hearted men calling this declamation : to them it is declamation ; to them, indeed, it is madness ; yet can we, who have known what it is to have Christ coming to us through all our sin, say of a truth that, when we are most mad, we are most wise,—the ecstasy of love is the reason of faith.

If we lay firmly hold of these two points—viz., the sinfulness of sin, and the work of Jesus Christ—we shall come to know what is meant by what we have ventured to call the glow of piety. Only the liberated slave can know the joy of freedom—only the recovered leper can appreciate fully the blessing of health. Let an emancipated slave tell of the joys of liberty, and the man who has never felt the grip of a shackle will at once pronounce him a declaimer ; let a recovered leper say all he can of the delights of health, and the man who has never known a day's sickness will probably think him more or less of a fool. It is so with our preaching, or with our true Christian living ; it is not set in the common key of the world ; it cannot be judged by the rules of carnal criticism ; when it is praised as regular, thoughtful, prudent, let us beware, lest under these flattering names be hidden a deep, yet almost unconscious apostasy. By these strong words we seek to point out as the only solid basis of a genuine revival of religion the need of being distinct and positive in our faith. Let us know what we believe. Let us be able to say with sureness and thankfulness what is the Rock on which we stand.



Do not say that this is clipping the wings of mental freedom ; do not charge me with narrowness or sectarianism ; only be on the Rock, and you shall have upward scope enough ; only be sure about Jesus Christ as at once the Interpreter of sin, and the Saviour of sinners, and you may fly far on the wings of fancy ; you may bring gems from many a mine, and flowers from many

a garden. You may have your own way of saying things, you may speculate, and suggest, and discuss, only never turn sin into a flippant riddle, and never set up the Saviour as a mere conundrum in theology. Are we thoroughly at one on these two points? Do we know sin in its essential, unchangeable loathsomeness? do we love Jesus Christ as the only, the Almighty, and the ever-blessed Saviour? Then, out of this should come an intense fervour of piety. We should have strength here; we should come back to these points from all the wanderings of fancy, and all the bewilderments of temptation; we should hasten to these doctrines when the anxieties of religious thought are heavy upon us; we should publish these doctrines in explanation and defence of an enthusiasm which must appear as madness to those who have not seen the unseen or felt the power of an endless life. To have one strong point of faith is of more consequence than to enjoy the most splendid speculations, which vanish like an enchanted dream when touched by the realities of sorrow and death. To the young and ardent let me particularly, and with most anxious love, give a word of caution. There are not wanting men who will tell you that it is of little or no consequence what you believe. To the young mind this is very pleasant: it saves trouble, it leaves conscience untouched, it looks like liberty. Let me speak strongly yet soberly about this teaching. Having examined it, seen its effects on many men, and watched its general results, I am prepared to characterise it as a lie. I do not hesitate to teach that faith is the very root of life. What a man most deeply believes, that he most truly is. All earnest life is but a working out of earnest conviction. No man can live a deep, true, great life who lives upon the chances of the day, without convictions, without purposes, without principles on which he is prepared to risk the whole issue and destiny of his life. You will, after all, leave much unsettled; you will not encroach one iota upon the liberty of any man; you will still hold your mind open to receive new impressions, new visions of truth, new aspects of duty; yet you will have no standing-place, no home, no rest, until you can say with the love and fire of your heart, I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In the next place, having a distinct idea of what we truly

believe, we must have a public ministry which is faithful to the spirit and demands of Jesus Christ. We would speak with great caution upon this point, so far as personal methods of ministry are concerned. Every man must preach in the way that to him is best, most powerful, and most useful. What we wish to say is, that all Christian ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ in seeking the salvation of men. In my view of ministerial life, there is too much attention paid in the pulpit to controversial subjects. We have a great positive work to do. We have affirmative truths to teach. We have to cast out devils, not by controversy, but by divinely-revealed and authoritative truths. If we wish to take our part in the controversies of the world, the press is at our service; in the pulpit let us preach the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and mightily plead with men to repent and believe the gospel. There is scope enough for all our powers. We shall have to acquaint ourselves deeply with human nature; we shall have to read the heart until we know its devices, imaginations, and cunning deceits; we shall have to study the power of sin in the soul; we shall have to suffer with Jesus Christ; we shall have to inquire diligently into God's righteousness, mercy, and love; night and day we shall have to study the mystery of Redemption, and in doing all these things our every power will be absorbed and exhausted. If now and again, specially for the benefit of young men, we may have occasion to refer to controversies, let the reference be made with the lofty earnestness of men who are intent upon the salvation of those who hear us. We must not throw off the old words—Repentance, Faith, Salvation; and the things that they signify must be the very life-blood of our ministry. In any genuine revival of interest in Christianity there must be a revived interest in a preached gospel. The sanctuary will be thronged, and the thronging listeners will be justly impatient of everything that does not bear immediately and intensely upon the salvation of men. We sometimes talk of adapting our preaching to the age in which we live, of keeping it abreast with contemporary culture, and addressing ourselves to the habits of men of taste. In all this there may be truth enough barely to save it from the charge of insanity. My deepening impression is that, however we may modify our manner, the doctrine which is adapted to all ages,

to all tastes, to all circumstances, is that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Then must we be made to feel that the doctrines of the gospel are humbling doctrines; that they smite down our natural pride and self-trustfulness, that they kill before they make alive; that out of our utter impoverishment and nothingness they bring all that is distinctive and enduring in Christian manhood. Black will be the day, disastrous the hour, in which the gospel is pared down to meet the notions of any men. The gospel is less than nothing, if it be not the grandest revelation of the heart of God to the heart of man; and being a revelation, it must of necessity be clothed with an authority peculiarly emphatic and decisive. We believe the gospel to be God's answer to human sin and human sorrow; and if any man ask where is its authority, we answer, "The blind do see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the dead are raised to life." Christian living is the best explanation of Christian believing; Christianity is the best explanation of Christianity; and more preaching is the best answer to all opposition.

Whilst there should be full and bold proclamation of evangelical doctrine in the pulpit, there should also be a system of teaching proceeding more privately. We believe thoroughly in sound, critical, extensive teaching. Some men have a peculiar gift in Biblical teaching; and those men should be encouraged to pursue their laborious but most necessary vocation. The preacher and teacher should be fellow-labourers. The preacher should collect men into great companies, arrest their attention by earnest and convincing statements of Christian truth, and then pass them on, so to speak, to the critical and patient teacher. Thus the man of God will become thoroughly furnished;—having received deep instruction, he will be able to give a reason for the faith and hope that are in him, and he will be strong to resist the importunities of those who are driven about by every wind of doctrine. We have had unjust and unreasonable expectations respecting the ministry. We have looked for all sorts of work from ministers; they have been expected to be eloquent preachers, popular lecturers, learned writers, acceptable visitors, skilled controversialists, untiring evangelists, and

many other important and influential characters. This is the covetousness that tends to poverty. Let a man be one thing, and let him excel in it. I wish the Christian pulpit to be my world ; in it I would work as a willing servant, and in it I would die like a soldier sword in hand. Another brother is a teacher, learned, critical, and patient with slow scholars ; another is blessed with a high pastoral gift, by which he can make himself as an angel of God in the family ; another is a ready writer, who can fascinate the eye of taste, or convince the stubborn-minded : be it so ; it is right, it is best. When Christian truth and Christian feeling revive amongst us, we shall be as the heart of one man, each magnifying God in the other. We shall all be wanted ; the trumpet, the flute, the organ, the stringed instrument—the soldier, the physician, the teacher—the orator, the scholar, the poet—the strong man, the gentle woman, the tender child—all will be wanted ; and the only strife amongst us will be who can do most and do it best for the Lamb that was slain !

-We have heard of a great musical composer who was conducting a rehearsal by four thousand performers ; all manner of instruments were being played, all parts of music were being sung. In one of the grand choruses which sounded through the vast building like a wind from heaven, the keen-eared conductor suddenly threw up his baton and exclaimed, “Flageolet !” In an instant the performance ceased. One of the flageolet players had stopped ; something was wanting to the completeness of the performance, and the conductor would not go on. It shall be so in the Church. Jesus Christ is conducting his own music. There is indeed a vast volume of resounding harmony rolling upwards towards the anthems which fill the heavens ; yet if one voice is missing he knows it ; if the voice of a little child has ceased he notes the omission ; he cannot be satisfied with the mightiest billow which breaks in thunder around his throne, so long as the tiniest wavelet falls elsewhere. Flageolet, where is thy tribute ? Pealing trumpet, he awaits thy blast ; sweet cymbals, he desires to hear your silvery chime ; mighty organ, unite thy many voices in deepening the thunder of the Saviour’s praise ! And if there be one poor sinner who thinks his coarse tones would be out of harmony with such music, let him know

that Jesus Christ refines every tribute that is offered in love, and harmonises the discords of our broken life in the music of his own perfection.

There is one feature in our public Christian life which we should like more fully brought out, and that is the bearing of individual testimony on behalf of Jesus Christ. By no means let us seek to supplant what is known as the regular ministry, but rather supplement it; and at all costs destroy the impression that nobody has a good word to say for Christianity except its paid teachers. Such an impression is, of course, at all times utterly and most cruelly false; yet there is a possibility of so enlarging and strengthening our testimony as to secure the happiest results. Why should not the banker, the great merchant, and the eminent lawyer say publicly what God has done for their souls? If the Prime Minister of England, if the Lord Chancellor, if the judge upon the bench, if the well-known senators would openly testify on behalf of Jesus Christ, they might produce the deepest possible impression for good. Such testimony would destroy the slanderous and blasphemous notion that Christianity is not adapted to the strength, the culture, and the advancement of the present day. It would arrest the attention of genius; it would infuse a new tone into the conversation of the highest circles; it would supply novel material for newspaper comment. We shall be told that this would be "sensationalism;" but let us beware lest the devil find in that alarming word one of his easiest victories over Christian duty and Christian courage. Is it not high time that there should be sensationalism? Have we not been troubled with indifference long enough? Has not Jesus Christ become a merely historical name in many quarters? Terrified by the impotent bugbear of sensationalism; hushed into criminal silence by the possible charge of sensationalism; frightened into holes and corners lest anybody should cry "Sensationalism;" living tamely, dastardly, shamefacedly, because there is such a word as sensationalism! Is this manly on our part, or true, or just, or grateful? If this be sensationalism, how comes it to be so? Is it not by contrast with long-continued indifference, with cruel silence, with unholy self-indulgence? Could we not soon put an end to the charge of sensationalism,

by the strength, the constancy, the ardour of our consecration? Sensationalism is a momentary cry—we may silence it by life-long continuance in well-doing.

Let those who have social, political, literary, and commercial influence throw it boldly and earnestly into the cause of Jesus Christ; it is but common justice; having received much they owe much; and as the time of payment is brief—alas, how brief! a shadow, a hurrying wind—let them be prompt if they would be just. Will you who are full of sin and sorrow throw yourselves at the Saviour's Cross and cry mightily, "God be merciful to me a sinner"? Wait there until you receive the forgiveness of your sins. Do not yield to any suggestions to go elsewhere. You will know that you have received the answer when your hearts are filled with a deep, joyful, unspeakable peace. Will you who have long borne the Saviour's name carry the banner of your profession more loftily, more steadily, and more humbly? Will you who preach the gospel give your nights and days to deeper, tenderer communion with Jesus Christ, desiring of him the all-including gift of the Holy Ghost? Will you who are in business live in the spirit of the golden rule? Will you who are heads of houses walk before your families in the fear and love of God? Are you forming the holy vow? In your heart of hearts are you renewing your covenant with the Saviour? May the word of the Lord prosper; may we know that Christ is gathering many spoils; and realise that the Cross of the Saviour is still able to draw men's hearts, and to hold them for ever by the omnipotence of love.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, as we began the year in thy name and in thy strength, so would we close it to thy praise. Thou hast done great things for us whereof we are glad; thou hast led us by a way that we knew not and by paths we had not known. Thou hast been eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; thou hast cared for us with all the tender care of love. Thou hast not forsaken us even for a small moment; with everlasting mercies hast thou surrounded us, and by their gentle ministry thou hast made us strong. When we feared as we entered into the cloud we heard a voice in the cloud speaking of Christ; when we wondered what would occur thou didst send thine angel to strengthen us and give us peace. We are now enabled to trust the Lord with our whole heart; we will take no more care of our own life that we may save it: he that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life in the love of Christ shall find it. We desire to have the gift of faith, so that we may believe all this holy testimony, and conduct our life along these sacred lines. We would be quiet, resigned, perfectly tranquil; we would rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, and as for our heart's desire we know it shall be granted unto us. Thou hast led us by ways that startled us, and thou hast brought us nigh unto precipices by which we were affrighted, yet thou hast by thy good hand upon us set us in thy house, given us the new song, and caused our faces to be turned towards the gentle heaven. In our houses we have seen the Lord, in the winter's fire and in the summer sunshine, both coming from one great fount of heat and light. Thou hast laid bread upon our table, common when we touched it, but sacramental when thou didst break it and give it unto us; we have not eaten unblessed bread, we have not slept the sleep of those who fear or care not, ours has been the child's rest of perfect trust in God. If there have been nights succeeding days they have brought with them all their troop of stars; when the days have come they have opened like pages in a new book, written all over with the finger of God. Now the year is dying, the year is all but dead, it will vanish into the shadows, and we shall write its name no more. God be merciful unto us sinners: wherein we have done wrong let the time past suffice. Give us consciousness of thy love, such consciousness as will not throw us into despair, but will lead us to the Cross where all sin may be forgiven. If we have done anything in thy strength and in the interests of thy kingdom, God be praised for the opportunity and the power; if we have been unkind one to the other let all bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamour cease now. The Lord help us to love our enemies that we may forgive them; the Lord give us confidence in himself, increase our

love towards the Cross, and rule us more completely by the ministry of his Holy Spirit. Grant unto all men wisdom, direction, comfort in sorrow; and show them where the fountain of life is, and withdraw many of us that we may be refreshed by rest and by communion with God. Be round about our life—a dwindling quantity upon the earth, but growing towards immortality in the heavens. Help us to live the rest of our time here in pureness and gentleness and usefulness, and may men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and have learned of him. Be round about our houses and make them habitations of the just: go with us into the market-place that we may keep a wise and understanding heart amid all the temptations and distractions of this world; and in the time of sorrow may we show Christian submission, and in the hour of loss may we be enabled to fall back upon the riches that are treasured in Christ Jesus. The Lord hear his servants in these things, seeing that these supplications and praises are poured out at the foot of the Cross; and mercifully send the suppliants answers of peace. Amen.

Psalm lxxxviii.

1. O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee :
2. Let my prayer come before thee : incline thine ear unto my cry ;
3. For my soul is full of troubles : and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.
4. I am counted with them that go down into the pit : I am as a man that hath no strength :
5. Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more : and they are cut off from thy hand.
6. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.
7. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.
8. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me ; thou hast made me an abomination unto them : I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.
9. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction : Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.
10. Wilt thou show wonders to the dead ? shall the dead arise and praise thee ? Selah.
11. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave ? or thy faithfulness in destruction ?
12. Shall thy wonders be known in the dark ? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ?
13. But unto thee have I cried, O Lord ; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.
14. Lord, why castest thou off my soul ? why hidest thou thy face from me ?
15. I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up : while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.
16. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me ; thy terrors have cut me off.
17. They came round about me daily like water ; they compassed me about together.
18. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

THE LAND OF FORGETFULNESS.

"Shall thy wonders be known in the dark ? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ?" (ver. 12).

THIS psalm is very mournful. The Psalmist is in great fear and sorrow. He has been crying day and night before God time out of mind. He is afraid that his prayer will never get to heaven ; it will be lost somewhere in the darkness. By day his soul is full of troubles, and his life draws nigh unto the grave. He is a man who is marked for the pit. His strength has utterly given way ; he is sure that he is going into the grave to be numbered with those who are remembered no more. He says that God has laid him in the lowest pit in darkness, in the deeps. He says that God's wrath lies hard upon him. He tells God that he has no more waves in all his great sea that he can roll over the head that is bowed down in loss, and shame, and grief. Then he begins to ask questions. He wonders what will happen :—" Wilt thou show wonders to the dead ? shall the dead arise and praise thee ? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave ? or thy faithfulness in destruction ? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark ? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ?" This was a conception of the under-world. It was all darkness, all night, all silence, all deprivation. There was no immortality in the thought, no kind, blue, gentle heaven bending over the imagination of the people who formed that conception of the under-world ; and they themselves had not dared even to fancy a heaven. There is a fabled river in ancient mythology called Lethe,—simply meaning forgetfulness. The idea of the fabulist was that whoever drank water out of that river instantly forgot everything that had happened ; all the past was a forgotten dream. Nay, more than this, consciousness itself was not left after the Lethal water was taken. The man who drank one draught of the water of Lethe, oblivion, was not aware of his own existence ; that draught had utterly extinguished him. Men have often longed for a draught of that water ; men have sighed for the land of forgetfulness ; souls, harps on which music was meant to be played, have desired with unspeakable earnestness to be allowed to die, to forget, to be forgotten.

In some aspects the land of forgetfulness is a desirable land. There are moments when we want to enter it and be enfranchised in it for ever. We could lie down with the dead,—not with dead bodies only, that is nothing; the flesh is not the man: but there are moments of despair, spiritual chagrin, and self-detestation, when we could wish to be utterly blotted out and to be as if we had never been. We want to forget; memory is a tormenting friend; we have tried many a draught and many opiates if haply we might tempt the brain into final and everlasting sleep. What are these images that fill the air? What are these voices that rend the air? What are these touches that make us alive all over with life that overflows:—keen, sensitive, agonised life? What is it that makes our life occasionally one burning pain? Surely God would not thus pursue and afflict us and throw us down if he meant that we were to end our existence in the grave. Is he not speaking to us that he may awaken our better nature? Is he not calling us to spiritual consideration? Is he not determined to torment us into goodness if he cannot lure us into the reverence that precedes loving surrender of soul to his will? How many men would gladly enter the land of forgetfulness? Things done forty years ago may not look at us with very vivid eyes, but they stir. A stirring frightens us more than a good straight defiant look would do. There is a silence that is terrible; there is a motion that means so much more than itself; it is suggestive that the judgment is coming, the penalty is impending, the end is near. There are things that other people have done to us that we long to forget; if we could wholly forget them life would be sweeter, friendship would be dearer, the outlook would be altogether more inviting. What is it that makes the land of forgetfulness a land in poetry, a land inaccessible? Is there no potion that the soul may take? there are potions that the body may drink, but we do not want to drink our bodies into some lower level and some baser consciousness; we are inquiring now about soul-potions, drinks that affect the mind, draughts that lull the soul.

There are other aspects in which the land of forgetfulness is an attainable land. We can so live as to be forgotten. Men can live backwards. Men can be dead whilst they are alive, and

forgotten while they are present to the very eyes. What is there to remember about them? Beginning as ciphers they have continued as ciphers; they have never done anything for the world, or for any individual in the world. Where are the parts of character on which we can lay hold and say, By these we shall remember you evermore? What miracles are possible to man! He can so live as never to speak a word the world will care to remember; no sentence of his will ever be quoted; no beautiful sentiment ever escaped his lips; never was there a picture upon his face, never did morning gleam in his eyes, never did music engage his voice. We can so live as to be forgotten at our own fireside. There is nothing done that could be remembered. No child ever said, He brought me a toy, he made me glad, he played with me. No sorrowing heart can say, He was so gentle; if he did not pray aloud, his very breathing was praying; when he looked it was a benediction; his very speech had music in it. So when there is a funeral it is not a mere putting away of the body, it is an obliteration of the whole identity. There is nothing missed, there is no sense of loss, the air is not vacant; the very solitude has a grim hospitality of its own. How are we going to live? When we die are people to say, We have lost something; we have lost life, we have lost leadership, we have lost companionship, we have lost the touch that made us strong, we have lost the music that sanctified silence and made the house a church all the week long: what is it that has gone? Then will come the loved name. Not the moment of weakness will be remembered when you shrunk into insignificance, and were frail and humble in your own sight, but some point of strength will be remembered in that glowing life of yours, and that point of strength will be the remembered picture, and it shall be spoken of, the quality of your character, the generosity of your hands, the largeness and lovingness of your hearts, long as memory retains and discharges her happy function. What is it that some men want to make them more conscious of life and more conscious of responsibility? Why do not all men seek to do something as well as receive something? We ought not to be mere receptacles, we ought to be fountains as well as reservoirs, always giving out some new stream of sacred water, always offering the world some larger and purer benefaction. The world is made up to us of ones and twos.

We know nothing about the millions. There are forty million people say in the island; we do not know them, they are not even moving figures before our eyes, for we can only see a few at a time, and the most of the millions we shall never see at all. It is this man, this woman, this child, this friend, this association, this comparatively little sphere that makes our earth heaven. Why not then be so good within it as to fill it with endeavour if not with success? If you will make up your minds to be remembered at home all the rest will take care of itself. There are some remembered at home whom crushed hearts would gladly forget. It is possible for you so to use your own child that that child will come in its old age to hate your name, and to say, Let that name never be mentioned in my hearing! You can live so if you like. Have faith in the man who is well-remembered at home. What do his chief associates say about him? Not, what do the newspapers say about him, or strangers, or paid critics, or hireling scribes, or indifferent observers; but what do they say about him who eat bread with him, who know him all the day, who see him in spring, in summer, in autumn, in winter, in health, in disease, on the mountain-top and on the level: what is their account of him? Do they long for him, miss him, wish for him, look out of the window and say, Oh that I could see him! for then would the house be glad? That is the only fame really worth living for; that is a sacred reputation: let all the rest take care of itself. We are thus narrowed down, focalised, so that one other life makes all the millions tolerable, one point of sympathy links us to the universe. Live richly, live tenderly, live so that souls will yearn for you when your turn comes to pass out of sight.

The land of forgetfulness is therefore in some aspects a desirable land, in other aspects an attainable land, but thirdly, it is in fact an impossible land. Effects follow causes: deeds grow consequences. Whilst, however, there is a sense in which a man may die and be forgotten, yet there is another sense in which his evil lives after him, and creates for him new epitaphs every day deepening in their malediction. The wine you drank in order to put the evil deed out of your mind will turn cold within you, and losing its heat you will lose the obliviousness

which it momentarily gave you : so curious is nature in her working that the very momentary obliviousness shall kindle into larger, quicker vividness the very thing which you thought you had lost in intoxication. The children are to live after you, and you may be putting a most horrible stamp upon them, or you may be putting upon them a most beautiful signal and making them rich with sacred, tuneful, elevating memories, the very mention of which shall lift them above all care and solicitude and give them a new hunger towards the heavens. Every man is a minister, a preacher ; every man is numbered among the clergy of God, revealing God, lifting up his own family into better life, if so be he will obey his function, the call of God.

Looking at the matter from a Christian standpoint, we have this gospel preached to us, namely, that evil can be forgotten. The Lord said he would forget ; Omnipotence would find no place in all its infinity for sin. Thy sins and thine iniquities shall be remembered no more for ever : I will cast them behind me. Where is that land—the land that lies behind infinity ? But sin cannot be forgotten until it is forgiven. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Do not imagine that forgetfulness is an intellectual feat on the part of God. Never suppose that for some psychological reason impenetrable to our inquiry the Lord has contrived to forget that he ever made a world. The Lord forgets nothing : but after a process known to us by the sweet name “forgiveness” there comes the state in the divine mind which is known by the human word “forgotten.” Sometimes we say we can forgive but never forget. Then we cannot forgive ; and if we cannot forgive we cannot pray ; if we cannot forgive we cannot believe. Forgiveness is the true orthodoxy. Largeness, sensitiveness, responsiveness of heart, slavery to love, that is orthodoxy. Consider this : if we do not forgive one another, God will not forgive us, and if God does not forgive us he cannot forget our sin, and if he cannot forget our sin he must punish it : and when God punishes, what imagination of man can conceive the quality, the extent, and the duration of that penalty ? God never forgets man’s humblest service. There is no law by which that service can be blotted out. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and

labour of love. He remembers what the workers themselves have forgotten; he will tell them at the last what they have done, and they will say, Lord, when? when? We have no recollection of this having taken place. Then he will remind them when it was all done. And he also remembers what is not done:—Ye did not. . . . Ye came not. . . . Ye visited me not. And then will come the question, When, Lord? Oh, tell us when! when? We never saw thee sick, or in prison, and did not come unto thee; we never saw thee an hungred or athirst and did not minister unto thee: when, Lord, did all this occur? And he will say when. Neglected opportunities are aggravated sins. You might have helped that man and did not; that is set down against you in Christ's book. The man asked you for a cup of cold water, and you shut the door in his face: it is written down in the books. Your own flesh and blood came to you and asked for help, and you refused it: it is written down. You have ministered to those who were destitute, afflicted, tormented; you have opened your doors and said, Come in, and said it in such a gentle voice that the very saying of it was itself a pledge of security: it is all written. No man can give a cup of cold water to a disciple in Christ's name without that cup of cold water being spoken of by the Lord himself; and if anybody should break one box of nard and pour it upon the Lord's head, that shall be told in all the languages of time and in all the nations of the earth, a perpetual, a fragrant memorial.

Let us forget all unkindness, incivility, discourtesy. Let us forget our good deeds. That will be one great step towards the land of heaven. There are some who remember every good deed they ever did, and therefore they never did anything worth doing. No man has ever done anything for God if he has kept account of it. It may be difficult to teach this lesson, and to drive it home; but so long as a man can tell you when he gave pounds and shillings, and when he rendered service, and to what inconvenience he put himself, all that he did is blotted out. The value of our greatest deeds is in their unconsciousness. The rose does not say, I emitted so much fragrance yesterday and so much the day before. The rose knows nothing about it; it lives

to make the air around it fragrant. Thus ought souls to live, not knowing how long they have preached, how much they have done, what the extent of their good deeds has been. They know nothing about it; they are absorbed in love; they are borne away by the divine inspiration, and whilst anything remains they suppose that nothing has been given. Do not have a dramatic land of forgetfulness, do not create some momentary oblivion, and think that you have done everything because you have stored your past within its dreary clouds. Be frank with yourselves: write down all your evil deeds and humble yourself to every man you have wronged. If you have done any man wrong, the humblest servant in your employment, go and tell him and beg his pardon. If you have kept back one solitary penny of the price pay it with interest and beg the pardon of the man you have wronged. If you have spoken unkindly to your dearest friend, spend the remainder of your life in speaking sweetly. If you have been caught in anything that is of the nature of wrong, betake yourselves to the Cross, the Saviour's Cross, the Cross of sacrifice, the altar of pardon, and there talk out the matter with the offended Lord. We say good-bye to thee, 1889, so far as Sabbath-days are concerned. We thought to have used thee better; thou didst come to us as a white spotless sheet of paper from heaven, and we meant to write thee all over with bars of music, vows of loyalty to Christ, with purposes and endeavours such as the Cross itself would approve. Here and there we find some good writing. There the Lord helped us in very deed. But so much of the writing is poor; there are so many erasures and interlineations and marginal notes, we cannot read it; we do not want to read it, it hurts our eyes. That paper is storied with falsehood, meanness, broken vows, and many evil things. Lord, grant us another scroll—1890—let us have it, and help this poor stumbling hand to do better. For Christ's sake we ask thee for that scroll and for that better hand. Amen.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee that, though we are always dying, yet we cannot die : thou hast given us immortality in our Lord Jesus Christ, and though the flesh must fall into the grave, yet shall our spirits rise and praise thee in other worlds, duration without end. This is our hope, and sometimes it is our agony, for are we not now in the wilderness ? are not the enemies abundant ? do they not come upon us at unexpected times ? and is not our immortality somehow threatened by foes we cannot repel ? Sometimes we long to escape these narrow boundaries of time and these limitations of sense, that we may enter into the complete liberty, the glorious freedom, of the sinless kingdom. Give us patience, help us to wait as men who would gladly go but are remaining here to do the Lord's will. Save us from all repining discontentment and bitterness of soul, give unto us the deep rest of faith, the sweet and tender peace of assured acceptance with God. In all things fill us with the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ : he is thy Son, he is the living Vine ; may we be in that living Vine as living branches, bringing forth much fruit, so that thou mayest be satisfied. We bless thee for all thy care : we cannot tell where it begins, we know not where it ends ; we cannot lay a line upon the measure thereof, nor can we count its innumerable instances. Behold our life is a witness of thy care, and we daily testify to the presence of thy Spirit in our life, working out for us ways we could not have carved for ourselves and giving us solutions infinitely beyond our own sagacity. Let thy word dwell in us richly ; a living word, a word so deep, so high, so full of music and all hopeful voices, a word that is a word of light, illuminating the darkness and making all things beautiful. Sanctify to us our sorrows : may our tears be the showers that water the roots of our joys ; may we know that thou dost not willingly afflict the children of men ; teach us the mission and the power of discipline ; may we remember that we are the creatures, not the creators, of the universe, and, being such, may we humbly bow and yield to thee the homage of loving trust, knowing that thou doest all things well. Turn our hair white with age, break down our backs with heavy burdens and lame us in every limb we have ; take the roof from above our heads and the bread from our tables and the water out of the channel that flows by the house-side—but take not thy Holy Spirit from us. The Lord bless the little children here and at home : set a child in the midst of us to teach us the mystery of thy kingdom, and rebuke us in all our greatness and pride and ability and cleverness—teach us that our hope and our heaven are to be found in the meekness and charity and nobleness and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in whose great, sweet Name we pray. Amen.

Psalm xc. 10.

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten."

THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS.

ON hearing this statement some may wonder that so well-known a fact should be used as a text. It is just because it is so well known, and, indeed, so universally admitted, that we wish to see what practical use can be made of it. So far as the fact itself is concerned, there is no opposition or difficulty amongst us. We receive the text with an assenting sigh. We bow our heads in homage to the tyrant death, knowing that it is useless to bruise our soft hands against his iron sceptre. In childhood we laughed at him as a fiction, in manhood we forgot him as a concealed ghost, in advancing age we accost him with reluctant respect, and offer him the grudging hospitality of mourning and sighing, with more or less of articulate distress and lamentation. We know our span; it is but a handbreadth, and it shortens as we measure it. All this is freely and universally admitted; but we wish to ask what kind of conduct ought to be based upon these solemn admissions. Let us grope, or find our way, little by little, from that which is admitted to that which is revealed, and which stands as a perpetual challenge of our attention and a constant appeal to our confidence.

Let us first of all look at our life a little in detail. The days of our years are threescore years and ten. There is more sound than reality in that statement. We do not live seventy years, though we die on our seventy-first anniversary. The figures are illusory. Take from the seventy years some five years of more or less irresponsible infancy, and the figure drops to sixty-five. From sixty-five subtract one-third of itself as spent in sleep, and the figure drops to some forty-three years, or a little more than five hundred and sixteen little months. That is, assuming that we live out the whole string of the seventy years. But let us take the obviously too high average of human life at fifty years: make the same deductions, and we shall find the average of human life reduced to some thirty years, or three hundred and

sixty short, swiftly passing months. It is but a breath, and just over it there glows a heaven and there burns a hell. Into that matter we do not now enter. But it is plainly before us that we have a certain portion of time to spend upon the earth, and we cannot be sure that any one of us will ever spend it. The breath we are now drawing may be our last; there is no guarantee of health, there is no surety given to us that we shall always have a clear intellect, a penetrating eye, a comprehensive mind. At any moment man may be deprived of this: he is followed by packs of wolves he cannot satisfy: on the right hand is an abyss, on the left hand is also an abyss: many a time in the sky there are lowering clouds—what is man to be and to do within this little span of about three hundred and sixty months?

We are told that wise men know exactly from time to time where their money is; they know what money they have, and they know where to find it or how to account for it. We should be as exact in measuring and accounting for our time as we are in respect to our money. Let us try to get at the religious use of time, and hold ourselves as the treasurers of the costliest jewel that can be committed to the care of creatures. The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Man cometh forth as a flower and is cut down, he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time—literally, buying up the opportunity, buying up the chance—for the days are evil.

This course of reflection might easily become so misapplied as to lead to most mischievous results; we must, therefore, presently wholly change the tone. A foolish man hearing this might be led to measure everything by his own individual life, and thus never attempt any work except that of the most narrow and selfish kind. His dreary programme would read thus: "I am to be here at the best for some six hundred months; they are flying and perishing whilst I count them. I will buy me a Bible and retire to some mountain cave, and I will sit down and read it again and again till the months be gone. I will commit it all to memory; I will enter into no enterprises; I will venture nothing; I will have no high aspirations, no broad lines of work,

no purposes that reach farther than the sunset of the present day—what is the use of it all? I might be gone at any moment; I will therefore spend my life in sighs, and the sooner the end comes the better.” This would not be religion; it would be insanity. We are not to base our service on the narrow period of our individual existence: we are to remember that as the universe is larger than any star that shines within it, so humanity is larger than any of the personalities that people it, and we are to base our conduct upon the broadest conceptions of human life and human destiny.

Let me remind you that though life is short, yet it is immortal; both the statements are true, and are therefore reconcilable. The leaves of every summer fall and die, but the great forests fatten and strengthen, and wave in the winds of centuries. The king dies, the kingdom gets younger every day that lives a true life and sucks its juice from the heart of God. The preacher becomes an old man, withers and dies, and his pulpit sees him no more, but the ministry is immortal, the word of God abideth and is proclaimed for ever. An individual man dies and can no more be found than can the knell that dies upon his grave, yet humanity continues—continues building its cities, its temples and towers, weaving and spinning, carving and singing, going with a high joy, as if no grave had ever been cut in the breast of the green earth. We are not, therefore, to mope and moan about our own little day; we are not to lock ourselves up in the little prison of the uncertainty of our own existence; we are not to sit down and read the Bible till death tells us that it is time to go. We have to take in all the world as if it were our business to look after it; we must be inspired by our immortality, not discouraged by our frailty. Young man, you take your start from either of these two divergent points: you can make yourselves old men in an hour by reckoning upon your fingers the number of months you have to live, or you can start under the inspiration of your immortality, and say the work that you leave uncompleted will be carried on by others. You can lose your individuality in the great light, as the stars drop away into invisibleness when the firmament is ready to receive the infinite lustre of the one orb that can fill it from bound to bound. It is, therefore, to challenge

your immortality that I now address you : it is not to make you go to the grave to weep there, but to go to your work, to live in the endless, not to die in the limited and narrow sphere of threescore years and ten.

was thus that Jesus lived. He died ere he had lived out half his seventy years, yet he never died at all. He said : " Pull down what temple you like, that is good, and I will build it again : you cannot pull down God's temples except that they may be rebuilt and enlarged ; " and whilst the enemy had him, the one on the left shoulder and the other on the right, and were hurrying him away to kill him, he turned his head over his shoulder, as it were, and said, " Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Some are in pain and distress by reason of thinking much upon the brevity of life, they have been looking at one side only of a very solemn subject. We ask you now to rise from your perusal of the brevity of life, to ponder the fact that this life is but the porch that opens upon immortality. Poetry hardly trifling with history has sometimes touched us to the very blood upon this point. The warrior dies, and says, " I am glad it is all over so far as I am concerned : I wish I had never entered into the war ; I care not now what becomes of it."

"The war, that for a space did fail,
Now trebly thundering, swelled the gale,
And—Stanley I was the cry ;
A light on Marmion's visage spread,
And fired his glazing eye :
With dying hand above his head
He shook the fragment of a blade,
And shouted Victory !"

That is the man to lead armies, to inspire nations, to consolidate churches—the man who does not say, " I care not whether it is victory or defeat," but who in his last breath says " Victory." Trust such men, and not those who write threnodies upon human life as little, mean, narrow, and perishable, instead of being great, noble, and immortal. }

The two men now being bound to that stake in Oxford are called Ridley and Latimer. In five minutes the fire will leap upon them and they will be killed. Quoth one to the other, just as the fire was being lighted, "Brother, we shall light such a candle in England to-day as shall never be put out." These were not men who moped over their threescore years and ten, who sighed themselves away into decorous oblivion, who lived little narrow respectable lives nowhere, and finally went into nothing: they were men who made England—who made heaven almost. Their very names are inspirations, and must not, cannot, be forgotten.

So Christ brought life and immortality to light. The Psalmist wrote: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten;" Christ said: "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it: in these threescore years and ten I will find enough for your immortality." He says, "Sit down;" he takes the years, breaks them with his hand, and lo! the seventy loaves spread out into an infinity of banqueting, and in this poor little germ life of mine he found the beginning and the spring of duration long continued as God's own.

Let me remind you further that though life is short, yet it is rich, and that is a consideration which invests life with responsibility. We must do the more on that account. Everything is made ready to our hands. There seems now to be nothing else to be done in the way of invention or of general civilisation. We are debtors to the past: we must consider how we can be the creditors of the future. Our forefathers laboured: we have entered into their labours—are we going to be content with them, or are we going to see what can be done to prepare for a great posterity? We now say that money is not so valuable as it was fifty years ago. If you tell your friends what your old father lived upon half a century since, they will say, "That is all very well, but a sovereign then went as far, perhaps, as two sovereigns will go now, so it is no use your basing any economical laws upon such precedents as these." There is sense in that criticism. But what is true of money is exactly untrue of time.

√ Time fifty years ago and time to-day are not to be compared;

they are to be contrasted. We can do fifty times the work that could be done centuries ago in this very country. The library stands ready for the scholar; the steamship is awaiting the traveller; the earth is torn into mines and shafts for the scientific explorer; the telescope is turned towards the heavens, and asks for the exploring eye to use it. What chances are ours! It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for us, if we be faithless to our obligations. With telegraphs, telephones, and instruments of all kinds, with inventions of machinery the most subtle and wonderful, with all kinds of time-saving contrivances, to tell us that our seventy years are no longer than the seventy years of the Psalmist is to tell us what our own consciousness contradicts, and our own experience denies and repels. If he died at seventy, and we die at the same nominal period of time, we have had the chance of living fifty lives for his one.

What are you doing? What use are you making of the great facilities which are offered to you on every hand? Are you as slow as ever? are you going to read about the threescore years and ten as if they were figures that could be arithmetically measured? There is a moral measurement, there is a scientific measurement, there is a spiritual measurement, and it is to that higher measurement that we now call you. I cannot allow myself to say that I have only seventy years to live. It is true, arithmetically, but broadly it is false. I have a thousand years to live, and when the Psalmist and I meet at the great audit, and he hands in what he has done with his seventy years, I must require angels to help me to lift the burden of my conquests, if I have been a good and faithful servant.

With all this wealth of life, inventions, machineries, libraries, schools, opportunities of all kinds, with all these unreckonable riches of civilisation, we are still conscious of a gnawing and intolerable want. Civilisation has increased the pungency of that necessity. If civilisation had done less we might have thought it could have done more, and we might have been tempted to wait for it. We might have said, "Give civilisation time, and she will find the healing plant, she will bring up the golden store

that will drive all poverty away, she will fetch the sage from far-off lands that will solve every problem, illuminate every mystery, unloosen every chain; give her time, and she will find the balm to lull my brain to rest and give me the freedom that comes of profound and renewing sleep." Civilisation has exhausted itself. There is nothing more possible to civilisation except in the matter of degree. You cannot put your finger down upon one thing and say, "Civilisation has not attempted this yet." It may not have gone to the full length which it is possible to overtake, but civilisation has refined our houses, given us education, dispelled many prejudices, gathered around us riches of all kinds: civilisation has put pictures upon our walls, songs into our mouths, filled our houses with musical instruments, made everything beautiful and rich, and yet we have covered up a worm that dieth not with most charming flowers, with most beautiful coverings of all imaginable kinds. The one thing our civilisation has not touched in us is our sin. We have seen pictures and have gone home to lay our head upon thorns. We have heard music, an eloquent lie, and have fallen down on bruised knees to utter a sobbing cry for pardon.

So Jesus Christ still keeps his place in civilisation. He begins where others end. Where they cry from exhaustion he puts on his strength. Where the mystery bewilders and blinds them, he dispels it by many a shaft of light. He is the propitiation for my sins, he stands between me and God, and O, mystery of love, he stands between me and himself; for he too is Judge, and the sentence of life and death is upon his lips. He knows my days—he comforts me with many a promise. He knows my sin—he says he came to reply to its agony and to destroy its power. He knows my weariness, and he promises me rest in his own great heart, and let this be said about him—which can be said of no other man—he met the world's want, in words if not in realities. Say what we will about realities, this man mentioned the very thing we need most. He says, "You want life?" Yes, that is true. "You want rest?" Yes, above all things we want rest. "You feel hunger?" Yes, a gnawing hunger. "You are athirst?" Yes, aflame, afire with thirst. "Then," saith he, "I have mentioned your necessities: I will address myself to their

direct and immediate and complete supply." As a poetical conception, taking that limited view only, the Carpenter's Son stands above kings and crowned ones of every name and suggests what they had not ventured to dream.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten. We look on one side and hardly think them worth living at all. We put stones one upon the other and a wind blows them down. We say, "I will go into this or that city, and abide there a year, and buy and sell and get gain," and lo! on the starting day we are too ill to move. We are consumed before the moth, the insect is an antagonist we cannot conquer; we see the grave of our friend, and written at the bottom of it is, "Yours will be dug to-morrow." We feel how mean is life and how poor is the measure of our time. Then it is that we want a man to come to us with revelations of a higher kind, to speak to us of possibilities that do not lie within the arithmetical compass of our seventy years.

My life—so frail that an insect can consume it, a lamp, flickering so that a breath might blow it out—that is my life in itself; but hidden in Christ, hidden in God, hidden in the living Vine, part of the fellowship divine, "I can the darkening universe defy to quench my immortality, or shake my trust in God."

Psalm xcii.

(NOTE ON THE NINETY-SECOND PSALM.)

[NOTE.—A psalm of Sabbath musings. Not known whether it expresses the religious feelings of Israel generally after the restoration, or whether it owes its origin to any special event. The Talmud says that this psalm was sung on the morning of the Sabbath, at the drink-offering which followed the sacrifice of the first lamb (Num. xxviii. 9). It is a disputed question, even in the Talmud, whether this psalm relates to the Sabbath or the creation, or to the final Sabbath of the world's history, namely, the day that is altogether Sabbath. Delitzsch thinks that the latter is relatively more correct. He says only the Sabbath psalm repeats the most sacred name seven times.]

A MORNING MEDITATION.

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High!" (ver. 1).

IT is a good thing to go out of oneself—to think high thoughts—to feel how small we are in the midst of all the worlds, and yet how great we are in the love and care of God. This is how we can get rid of all that would thrust us down and make us feel the weight and shame of sin, in such a way as to quench the light of hope. Sweet Christ of God, I would think of thee in the hour when day dawns, and have thee think of me whilst all the hours call men to work and care, to stoop down to earth for bread, and meet all the stress of life's hard fight. Dawn upon me, O Light of the soul; then I will sing to thee as one who has no fear, but is rich in joy. Think of others also—of the sick and the poor, the blind and those who have lost their way; and if I can help any poor soul this day, let me do it, for thy sake.—The earth is very cold and sad and lonesome for many who dare not tell all their grief.

"To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning" (ver. 2).

It begins the day well, and what is "well begun is half done." The new day is as white paper, on which nothing is yet written.

It is a new chance. The morning is like a gate which opens upon a fresh field, where we may find work and bread and health. Ere the dew has gone up to the sun, I would send my best thoughts of love to the throne of grace, the very spring and fount of life, and thus get firm hold of the whole day, and rule it by faith and hope. What then can harm me? What foe can smite me? What evil voice can tempt me? Will God in very deed let me put my hand in his before I take one step into the rough, cold world, where there is so much to chill the heart and throw a dark cloud over the face of truth and purity and love? If he will, then I will lift my hand to his, and say, "Father, spurn not thy poor weak child, but take hold of me, love me, guide me." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Fill my heart with morning light.

"... and thy faithfulness every night" (ver. 2).

Then we know what God has done. The tale of love is fully told. Night is the judgment hour of the day. Here is a work to be done, not in fits and starts, but steadily and regularly—"every night." Nor is the work to be done secretly: we are to "show forth" God's faithfulness, to make it known, to speak aloud concerning it, and to glorify God in the presence of men. We may speak a good deal about God without speaking much for him. We are not only to talk of God's faithfulness to other people, but to ourselves. He did this to me, is to be the definite and cordial testimony of each believer. When the first star glitters in the twilight we may begin the grateful testimony, and when all the host burns in silent glory we may challenge every planet to share with us the holy duty of praising God. "Every night"—in summer, when it is easy to sing; in winter, when the cold wind might stifle music; in spring, when we sow in faith; and in autumn, even when the fields are thinly grown. "Every night": in youth, and age, and in the last dread night when there is no awaking for us on earth. Night has its own religion—solemn, reflective, penitential, grateful; let us be faithful to the genius of night, and be ever found at its sombre altar with a new and tender testimony on behalf of God's faithfulness.

"Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work" (ver. 4).

I look back upon all the way in which God has made me walk,

and truly I must praise him for finding such a way for me. I did not see the way. I did not choose it. At first I thought it could not be God's way, the hills were so high, the rocks were so large, the path was so rough, and there was so much to make me afraid. Now I see much that God meant, and I am glad—glad with great joy. All God's work that I can see is good—the sky, the sea, the earth, all things great and small; but his work to me—to my own life and soul—seems best of all. The work that lies before me this day is hard, and how to do it I know not. This is as the day of death to me. Yet this very night I shall come home with a new song in my mouth, and praise God with a loud voice, neither ashamed nor afraid that men should hear my giving of thanks. “Keep me this day without sin.” Let my feet be kept on the right road, and my eyes fixed on the right end; then shall I do good to many, and the work of day shall be followed by sleep “like infants’ slumbers, pure and light.”

“Thy thoughts are very deep” (ver. 5).

The Lord himself says: “My thoughts are not **as** your thoughts; . . . for, as the heaven is high above the earth, so are my thoughts than your thoughts.” So the thoughts of God are both “deep” and “high.” Man calls them “deep;” God calls them “high.” If they are both deep and high, how can we expect to see all their meaning without thinking long and earnestly about them? Nor is this all. We may have to wait a long time before deep thoughts show just what is meant by them. They do not spring up in a night and die at the going down of the sun. The higher the star is, the longer is the light in coming down to us. But what star is so high as the thought of him who made it? How good a thing it is to be able quietly to wait! The thoughts of God come up from eternity, and to eternity they stretch! It may be that not until I enter the world of light shall I know all that God is doing to me and for me now. Then he will tell me why the way was so long and hard; why I had to part with much I loved, with all my love; why other men were rich and I was poor; why some seed never came to blade, or ear, or full corn in the ear. His thoughts are very deep, but his love is most tender; in thought I cannot follow

him, but his love shines and sings and comforts on every hand. I will cling to the love where I cannot understand the thought.

“When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish ; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever ” (ver. 7).

The Psalmist did not know this until he went into the sanctuary. What do we really know until we study in the holy place and under the very light of heaven? Nothing! Nothing! The outside is full of deception, every colour is false, every attitude is a lie, every rose conceals a thorn, every garden hides a tomb. To be in sympathy with God is to be wise ; without that sympathy we may be clever, shrewd, temporarily successful, but we put money into bags with holes, and scatter our seed in stony places. Even if this life were all, the impious man has not the best of it. He has no high thoughts, no spiritual visions, no sense of a larger identity ; if these be dreams they are dreams that bless the dreamer and inspire him to do other people good. Let the grass typify the wicked ; let the stars typify the good and wise. I will not fret myself because of evil doers ; they are living on their capital, they are digging their own graves, they are slaying their souls. Lord, help me to live on thy truth, to follow the light of thy law, and to rejoice in the tranquillity of thine own peace. Yet I must not despise the wicked, nor leave them to perish ; I was once as they are. I will tell them what I know of God, and who can say whether they will repent, believe, and live?

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou art our rest, and our peace is for evermore in thee. There is no peace to the wicked, and there is no unrest unto them that put their trust in the living God. Our heart's desire, our most vehement and perpetual yearning, is towards thyself, thou only Complete One, who hast immortality: out of thee all is ruin, without explanation, a growing and bewildering perplexity, a riddle without an answer, and a dream filled with terror—but in God all is centred and at rest. Thou movest all things, for thou art behind them and above them and round about them. Thy throne is on the circle of eternity, and all our little time is far below thy feet. Thou dost make time our infirmity and our continual temptation; it lives to die, it throbs to expire, there is no immortality in its frail pulse; but when we remember the years of the Most High, an incalculable total, an immeasurable horizon, a store that hath no bound, then is our little time anchored in thine eternity, and we feel in our hearts a deep rest, a quiet Sabbath calm. Save us from the temptations of time, deliver us from the snares of the things that can be seen, the continual illusions, the things that tempt us, and then reward us with scorn and mockery, and help us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal. Teach us that he builds too low who builds beneath the sky; save us from thinking that we can lay up years as well as lay up much goods; teach us that we know not what a day may bring forth—to-morrow may be our eternity, to-day may be our sharp and sudden end. Thou art teaching us by circumstances around our lives and very near them indeed, that life is held on uncertain terms, that our breath is in our nostrils, that we die doing our duty, we fall suddenly in the great waters, the fire doth seize us in the deep pit, so that we are alway living in the shadow of death and by the margin of the grave. Help us, therefore, considering all this, to know the years of the Most High, and to draw our breath from God's eternity, so that there shall no longer be any death in us—it shall be a translation into the wide life, the ampler liberty, the new and mother city, the grand Jerusalem. Thou dost shorten our life day by day, yea, pulse by pulse dost thou rob us of our brief heritage of time. Thou surely dost mean us to think much of this, for we know that this life cannot be all, else whence these desires and instincts and hopes and dreams and yearnings that rise into ardent passions that would assail the gates of the invisible city? Behold, these things are thy testimony within us, yea, a witness from heaven, that thou art the God of our souls and the Redeemer of our lives. Help us therefore, to believe this, and to put our souls into thy keeping, as into the hands of a merciful Creator. We have come in the

name of Christ to give thee praise for all thy tender care, thy minuteness in watching all the circumstances of our lives. Thou knowest our downsit-
 ing and our uprising, our going out, and our coming in, there is not a word upon
 our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but lo! O Lord, thou
 knowest it altogether. Thou dost watch each of us as if each were an only
 child; thou dost lavish thy store of love upon every poor life as though it
 were thine only care; great and manifold are thy mercies, yea, tender is thy
 loving-kindness, thy patience is long continued, and thy longsuffering seems
 to be a root out of which doth grow thy joys. O wondrous Father, patient
 Father, loving God, redeeming Christ, speak peace to us from the heavens,
 and the earth shall no more remind us of death—it shall be the stepping-
 stone of our higher life. Regard us as gathered from many quarters,
 meeting for an hour in one centre, and that, our Father's house. May a
 filial spirit pervade the assembly, may we be like children at home gathered
 around the parental table, asking God our Father to give us the bread of life.
 Remind us of our sin only that thou mayest remind us of thy greater mercy;
 point out to us all our guilt, black and deep, unpardonable by ourselves even
 —then show us the Cross, the tree of life, where the Man is who is thy
 fellow, equal with God, but habited like a dying slave, and whilst we look
 upon his blood may it be unto us the blood of sacrifice and propitiation
 and atonement—no common blood, shed by murderous hands, but freely
 given from the fount of the heart to redeem the world and cleanse the sin
 of man. We are stained through and through—we are evil in our action and
 in our thought, and there is not a motive that rules our heart that dare show
 itself in the sunlight. God be merciful unto us sinners, and wash us in the
 all-holy and all-cleansing blood. Help us to think soberly and justly about
 life, about the present and the future, here and hereafter, this side and that
 the grave: let a spirit of joy sing in us every day, and as we are no longer
 slaves but free men, redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold,
 but with the precious blood of Christ, may we therefore rejoice in God our
 salvation and be glad with great rapture. Thou wilt not forget our dear
 ones who are sick,—the old man, panting for the youthfulness of heaven; the
 young maiden to whom life is denied, who goes up like the morning dew
 at the bidding of the sun; the impenitent and hard-hearted, on whom all
 prayers are lost, as the rains are lost on the burning sand; the prodigal on
 the sea, or in the far-away place, or hidden from the social eye—God be
 merciful unto all, for whom we ought thus to pray—let thy Gospel be heard
 by them to-day, may they arise because the Master calls. Lord, hear us;
 sanctify to us our sorrows, many and keen; let the bitterness itself be the
 beginning of sweetness in our life, mocked and disappointed and wounded
 where we ought to have had the most and best and purest love. May we
 look away from the broken columns that mark the graves of blighted hopes,
 away to the everlasting hills of light and the city all beautiful with gold, fine
 and never to be dim. Good Lord, we bless thee amidst it all: even our tears
 help us, even our sorrows enrich the life which they make gloomy often-
 times, and our joys are poor and mean that do not come out of the deep
 rootage of much grief and sorrow, like unto his who was acquainted with
 grief. Amen.

Psalm civ. 24-28.

"O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships : there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein. These wait all upon thee ; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather : thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good."

VOICES OF CREATION.

THIS is a great intellect in a contemplative mood. The appreciation of nature is the work of intellect ; hence, in proportion as the human mind is cultivated, is nature found to be teeming with instruction and sources of enjoyment. Never, perhaps, was nature more graphically described than in the psalm before us. Facts are here turned into poetry. Divine power is celebrated in strains the most elevated and inspiring, while the exquisite adaptations of nature are indicated with the minuteness and delicacy of the most analytic observation.

The opening reference presents a stroke of true sublimity : the Psalmist describes light as the garment of Deity. He speaks of the heavens being stretched out as a curtain—of God making the clouds his chariot and walking upon the wings of the wind ;—he lays bare the foundations of the earth, and sounds the depths of the great waters—looking down the sides of the mountains, he notes the springs gushing in music and beauty—he marks the wild ass quenching its thirst, and hears the fowls of heaven singing among the branches—he observes the sap circling in the trees of the Lord, and is impressed with the majesty of the noble cedars that adorn the crest of Lebanon ;—he notes the bird building its nest, the wild goat bounding over the rugged hills, and the feeble coney finding its lodgment in the rock. Having taken this survey, he turns his gaze towards the heavens, and watches the moon as she keeps her seasons, and bursts into rapture as the glory of the setting sun sheds its beams upon his vision—and, again reverting to earth, he hears the roar of the lion as he shakes the forest in searching for his prey—next he beholds the great deep with its gallant navy, and the

dread leviathan! We cannot wonder, therefore, that the amazement and gratitude of the Psalmist should break into the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all."

This world is not unfavourable to moral culture. It has been described as a "vale of tears," and as a "waste howling wilderness," and, to some extent, the description is accurate. We must ever remember, however, that our consciousness of guilt has perverted our vision and our taste, and that in proportion as we become godlike, will fresh beauties strike our eye, and new charms challenge our admiration. The Psalmist is holy on a planet which has been cursed, and even through the darkness of the divine frown can see gleamings and blazings of true glory.

All agencies are under the control of an Infinite Intelligence. Speaking of the waters that stood above the mountains, the Psalmist declares, "At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away." In this he asserts the great principle that all forces are under the management of divine wisdom and paternal love. We have the assurance, therefore, that our Father knows every tempest that sweeps through the air—notes every dew-drop that quivers on the opening flower—and is acquainted with every breeze that stirs the atmosphere. Conscious of this, we may accept without hesitation the exceeding great and precious promise: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." You will observe that God speaks of these with the familiarity of one to whose will they immediately bow.

The divine resources are equal to every exigency. The necessities of nature are endless. In all parts of the universe there are mouths opened, eyes upturned, and hands outstretched. Mouths, eyes, and hands are directed to a central Being, and what is his reply to this million-tongued appeal? Is there hurry or confusion in his palace? Is he surprised by some

unexpected exigency? Does he ask the suppliant throngs to pause until the excitement of their appeal has subsided? Nay! Hear the explanation of the Psalmist: "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing"! Mark the sublime ease which is here indicated. Could that ease have been more significantly expressed? Compare it with the anxiety and fretfulness of man when besieged with numerous appeals! How soon are his resources exhausted! How early does he cry for relief and rest! Yet as the universe takes its seat, so to speak, at the table of the Lord, the divine Benefactor simply opens his hand, and the universe is satisfied!

The divine existence is to constitute the central fact in all our contemplations of the universe. The Psalmist is not content with looking at nature: in the highest sense he "looks through nature up to nature's God;"—hence he opens the psalm with the cry, "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty." Having taken a survey of nature, he exclaims, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" And, having completed his inspection, he again turns upon his soul, and invokes it to praise the Lord. You hence perceive that God was the central fact in the Psalmist's contemplations. He never passed into a region whence he was unable to behold the Maker of all! When he looked at light he saw it as the robe of God—when he watched the refreshing shower he exclaimed, "he watereth the hills from his chambers"—from the fir-trees as the house of the stork, and the rocks as the dwelling of the coney, the Psalmist beholds the palace of the Eternal!

This fact serves three purposes:—(1) It disproves the speculations of pantheism. Pantheism teaches the identity of God and nature; but in this psalm we have more than fifty references, by noun or pronoun, to the existence and attributes of a personal agent! Behind all and over all the Psalmist describes a personal power as presiding;—he sees, as it were, the mysterious hand that has lighted the countless orbs which shine in the diadem of night; and amid the calm regularity of the universe he hears the sound of the divine "going." The Psalmist, therefore, distinctly teaches

the existence of a Being who is infinitely above the powers and glories of nature, and for whose pleasure they are, and were created.

(2) It undermines the materialistic theory. This theory teaches the non-existence of mind. What we call mind, it denominates a refinement of matter. The entire psalm, however, proclaims and celebrates the presence of Infinite Mind. It sings the honour of a Being who ponders the wants of his creatures, and who has delicately balanced the adaptations of nature and moral existences. Not only so, but every note that breaks from the Psalmist's inspired tongue proclaims the presence and the capabilities of mind. Regarding the psalm, therefore, as authoritative on the question, the materialistic theory is reduced to an absurdity.

(3) It invests the universe with a mystic sanctity. Everywhere we behold the divine handiwork. As the architect embodies his genius in the stupendous temple or noble mansion, so, as we have repeatedly affirmed, has God materialised his wisdom and power in the physical creation. You hold certain possessions dear on account of the mind which they represent, or the hands which they memorialise, and shall not the child of God appreciate the wonders of creative power, as he realises the fact that they testify to his Father's wisdom and love? to the Christian the wind becomes sacred, as he remembers that it is written, "he walketh upon the wings of the wind."

We see, then, in what mood the Psalmist conducted his contemplations of nature. Creation was to his spirit the very gate of heaven. He found an altar everywhere. The world was transformed into a "solemn temple." He did not walk through the world-museum as a mere utilitarian, though in nature's sublimest poetry he found the highest moral usefulness. Let us always survey creation with the eye of a Christian: surveying it with such an eye, we shall never fail to realise the most exquisite enjoyment—on every hand beauty will appeal to the eye, and in every season music will present her offering to the ear. Loneliness will thus become an impossibility. The mysterious ladder, connecting earth with heaven, will ever be visible. While the ascetic and the misanthrope are breathing

dolorous strains, we shall be uttering doxologies of thankfulness—while the cheerless mourner is describing earth as a barren desert, and a vale of tears, we shall be gratefully exclaiming,

“These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty, thine this universal frame,
How wond’rous fair : thyself how wond’rous then !”

The principle of dependence is everywhere developed in the universe. This assertion is abundantly sustained by such expressions as : “These wait all upon thee ; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” “That thou givest them they gather.” “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled : thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” “Thou sendest forth thy Spirit they are created : and thou renewest the face of the earth.” It is thus shown that every natural phenomenon is traceable, directly or indirectly, to the divine purpose or government. The varied natural changes are attributed to the Spirit of the Lord : when the flowers grace the earth, the Psalmist exclaims, “Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created ;” and when generations are consigned to the tomb he adds, “Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” The Psalmist, therefore, ignores the presence of “chance,” or “accident ;” in his view God is enthroned, and the divine dominion is over all !

We infer, then,—

First : The existence of an absolutely self-dependent power. Finite conception is totally unequal to the comprehension of such an existence. We have sung

“Thou art the ever-living God,
Were all the nations dead ;”

but how inadequate have been our realisations of the fact ! The brain reels as we contemplate the extinction of every star—the dissolution of every system—the annihilation of every life—the total ruin of the universe, and yet the divine power remaining unimpaired, and the divine glory blazing as dazzlingly as when it fell on the stupendous organisation of nature, and the countless legions of happy spirits ! Our want of comprehension, however, does not affect the sublime doctrine of God’s infinite

independence. We must sing of him to-day as when "heaven rung with jubilee, and loud hosannas filled the eternal regions:"

"Thee, Father, first they sung, Omnipotent,
Immutable, Immortal, Infinite,
Eternal King; thee, Author of all being,
Fountain of light, thyself invisible
Amidst the glorious brightness, where thou sitt'st
Throned inaccessible, but when thou shadest
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
Drawn round about thee, like a radiant shrine,
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,
Yet dazzle heaven, that brightest seraphim
Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes."

Second: The special mission of each part of the universe.—
The Psalmist in his wide excursion and minute observation detects nothing that is wanting in purpose. Man alone is failing in the exercise of his true function. All nature proclaims his shame, not by direct reference, but by self-consistency. From the grass-blade to the vastest planet that shines in the firmament there is harmony with the divine will; but in man there is impurity; in his arm rebellion rules! The sun never fails to pour splendour on the worlds which claim him as a centre; but man who is the glory of this lower scene has quenched his light, and now lurks in darkness, because his deeds are evil!

Third: The profound humility by which every intelligence should be characterised. Seeing that we are dependent on God for "life and breath, and all things," it becometh us to dwell in the dust of humility. There is one question which may well smite human pride, and bring human consciousness to an estimate of man's actual position, viz.: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Men of genius! Ye who boast of your power to rule the mind of multitudes, or betake yourselves into lofty regions, where you can be free from the intrusions of vulgarity; what have you that ye have not received? Your genius never sheds a single ray which is not borrowed from the Infinite Light, nor could it ever exalt you into those sacred realms of enjoyment, except by the power of the Infinite Arm! Men of money! What have you that ye have not received? Remember, that the silver and the gold are God's, and the cattle upon a thousand hills: the tact, the energy, the forethought, to which

you attribute your success, are as truly a divine creation, as is the sun in whose light you conducted your toils. "Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights." It little becomes us, therefore, to assume the airs of arrogance, or to use the rod of despotism. We are all dependent! Our breath is in our nostrils. The divine will determines the measure of our days; let us, therefore, in genuine humility, conduct the business of life, and prove our Christian discipleship, by reflecting his beauty who was meek and lowly in heart. Our rejoicing is this that we depend on One who cannot fail; on One who has only to open his hand, in order that his creatures may be filled with good: we need entertain no alarm as to the resources which are under God's control; for when the abundance of the physical universe is exhausted, we have yet in reserve, the unsearchable riches of Christ.

A devout contemplation of the universe is calculated to increase man's hatred of sin. This is strikingly evident from the concluding language of the Psalmist. Having beheld the symmetry, the adaptation, and the unity of the divine works, he directs his gaze to the moral world, and, beholding its hideous deformity and loathsomeness, he exclaims, "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more;" as though he had said, "There is one foul blot on this glorious picture; one discordant note in this enrapturing anthem. Let this spot be removed and the picture will be perfect; bring this note into harmony, and the melody will be soul-enthraling!" Have not kindred feelings agitated our own breasts as we have gazed on the landscape, or listened to the "melody of nature's choir," or praisefully watched the rising sun, "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race"? Has not a verdict on our species escaped our lips as we have mused on nature's magnificence, and that verdict assumed the well-known form—"only man is vile"? If so, we can sympathise with the Psalmist as he longs for the utter extinction of iniquity. When we cry out: "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more," in what sense do we pray for their annihilation? Certainly not as commanding fire from heaven to consume those who obey not the Gospel;

nor as praying that God would "stir up all his wrath," and consign his foes to eternal ruin. God and Christ, reason and mercy, alike forbid! We would consume the sinner by consuming his wickedness. We would terminate the generation of evil-doers by expelling iniquity from the moral creation. But can this be done? Is not the extinction of evil a Utopian dream? Nay! Blessed be God, "there is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness;" and again, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"! Christ came to consume the sinner by taking away the sin of the world; and all who exercise faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, having truly repented of sin, become children of light, and heirs of everlasting riches, being brought into harmony with the nature of God.

We conclude with a few words of a directly practical nature:—

First: God must be the central fact in our being. As he is everywhere influentially visible in creation, so should he be manifest in our daily demeanour. While engaged in the transitory affairs of earth, we should walk as those who "have no continuing city, but seek one to come;" and amid the restlessness of sublunary irritation, we should be fixed on the immovable Rock; the Rock Christ Jesus. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon;" this declaration we have on the highest authority. Let us, therefore, not squander our time in attempting the experiment, but accept the assurance as an infallible certainty. Let us take this as a fundamental principle, and if it produce its true effect, we shall love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and mind, and strength.

Second: What is the highest relationship we sustain to the Creator? We must, as we have seen, sustain one relationship to God, viz., that of dependant. No spirit, however self-sufficient, can find a region in which he can truthfully affirm "I have no need of God!" But is this the highest relationship which any of us sustain? God forbid! The worm beneath our feet, if gifted with utterance, would say, "I, too, am a dependant." Has it, then, come to this, that man—created in the image and likeness of God, is reduced to the level of the reptile? Are we content to be the mere "pensioners on the bounty of an hour"?

We are called to a higher standing : to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. This lofty privilege we may achieve through the infinite merits of the Saviour's sacrifice, for "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Third : This beneficent Creator also reveals himself as man's Saviour. God, through Christ, created the worlds, and through him also he renews the moral creation. We, therefore, worship God in Christ. It is not to the Creator, as such, that the penitent draws near in quest of pardon—it is to God as presented in the character and sacrifice of Christ that he directs his application. We revere the God of Nature ; may we accept him as the God of our Salvation : we tremble at the power of the Creator ; may we repent while beholding the tenderness of Christ. Reverence for the Creator will never save us, for there is no name given among men whereby we can be saved but that of Christ Jesus.

Fourth : The extinction of sin should be the good man's supreme object. He who converts a sinner from the error of his way, saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins. They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars in the firmament, for ever and ever. It is not for us to make light of sin. We are to regard it as God regards it, and of him it is declared that he cannot behold sin with the least degree of allowance. Let us, by divine grace, aid in the extinction of iniquity. The cry for our help is loud and urgent—it rises not only from distant shores, but from the heart of our own country, and every Christian can have no difficulty in interpreting its message into the oft-repeated language—"Come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we cannot tell how many are thy mercies; they are continual, they are more than the sands upon the sea-shore, and the stars are not so many in multitude as are the compassions of the Lord towards the children of men. Thou dost love us: thou didst so love the world as to give thine only begotten Son to save it. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us; and while we were yet enemies his Son died for us. We cannot understand this: it blinds our reason with an infinite light; we see not why it should have been: we can understand thine anger better than we can comprehend thy love, for we know that we have incurred the one and have not deserved the other. We forget God; we do not retain God in our thoughts: thou art the trouble of our life if not its supreme joy, thou art our hell if not our heaven. Thou knowest the world in which we are placed: behold, thou hast set us herein to dress it and to keep it, and we are idle men. No man ever misspent his hours as we have wasted the time thou hast given unto us. We have considered ourselves, we have consulted oracles that would flatter us, we have sought out the lie that would please us most for the passing moment, and we have listened to that lie rather than to the gospel of thy judgment and thy love. It well becometh us, therefore, to shut our eyes in shame, to run away into the darkness of the night, to put our hand upon our mouth and to say, each for himself, "God be merciful unto me a sinner." This we now say: every heart says it, every soul utters the penitential cry—surely thou wilt answer us as with trumpets and mighty voices from heaven, and the angels shall cry unto us that our iniquity is pardoned. We love the Saviour, though we often forget him: deep down in our hearts is a very tender love for his Cross. We can say to him, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee." Our sins are not greater than our love: our guilt is black, but our love is greater than our guilt. O wondrous mystery of the heart, yet so true. Lord, answer us, not according to the measure of our guilt, but according to the desire and yearning of our life. Amen.

Psalm cvi. 12-14.

"Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert."

SPIRITUAL DECLENSION.

WE have in these three lines some of the greatest words in human history, and some of the most vivid experiences of human life. We seem to need no one to expound these words

to us—they are written upon our memory, and they are inwrought, so to speak, into the very substance of our consciousness. We do not need to go back a thousand years and more to find out whether these things are historically true. Every man who knows himself accepts them every one. We have all believed, praised, forgotten, and tempted. What is now our duty? If that question can be answered directly and solemnly and with due effect in the life, this will be as a birthtime, memorable through all the ages that are yet to dawn upon our life.

“Then believed they his words.” This takes us back to a point of time. When did they believe his words? He rebuked the Red Sea, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths as through a wilderness and he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies; there was not one of them left. And when they saw the dead Egyptians lying around them, all gone, from the oldest to the youngest, they believed God’s words. Any credit due to them? Not one whit. “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

This brings us into the region of personal providential deliverances, and we have all been in that hallowed region. That such deliverances do occur every man who has read his life with any attention, will instantly attest. Our whole life is a providential deliverance. So blind are we, so foolish, that we expect only to see God in the miracle that is occasional, rather than in the miracle that is constant. Let me lure you, or if need be, scourge you, from the foolish idea that a miracle is something occasional and exceptional. There are indeed critical moments when the flash is brightest, when the voice is clearest and most resonant, but if we could read our life aright we should find that to be saved from disaster, to have evil prevented, as well as cured, is to live under the miraculous providence of an Almighty Father. We should say, were the great sun to crack, and fall in hemispheres upon creation, that if it could be put together again it would be a miracle. It is a grander miracle to keep it where it is, as it is, from age to age, always giving, never losing, always illuminating, never a beam the poorer for the infinite affluence.

See this aspect of your life and you will never have far to go for the miraculous and the sublime.

Still I challenge your attention to occasional interpositions of a very remarkable kind. You remember when the child was sick: in your silent forebodings you had buried the dear little life: you had never spoken about it. But contrary to all expectation and forecast, the life was redeemed from the grave, and set back in its place in the house. You remember that wolf with the long gleaming teeth that was pursuing you, and you were just about to lie down and pant out your last breath, and somehow the wolf was diverted from the pursuit, and you saw the enemy, savage and terrible, no more. You remember when you were within three paces of bankruptcy, and that a friend suddenly started up in your course and brought with him the key that opened the house of your prison. You remember just toppling over the precipice, just going, and you were saved, rather by a hand of wind than by a hand of flesh—something between a thought and a thing—undefinable, inexpressible—but you were brought back and set on solid ground. What was the result? Religious faith. For the moment you were a religious man. If in that moment any one had suggested to you that there was no God, all the forces of your blood would have risen against him in antagonism and passionate protest. You would have said, "Tell that to the idle winds, preach that wicked gospel to the beasts of the forest, to the waves of the sea, but to me you must make another declaration, for I myself have seen with these eyes angels and ministers of light and redeemers—yea, I have seen God."

Would that we had died in some of these raptures of faith. We have had days in life when it had been well for us if God had opened a door in his blue heavens and taken us to himself. To die with this triumphant faith and with this great grace overflowing the heart would surely be to go to heaven. But what drops there are in life, what descents from high mountain scenes and breezes, into imprisonments and poisonous atmospheres, and graves out of which it seems to be impossible that any trumpet can awaken us, so deep, so black.

But as in the text, so in our own experience, we have gone beyond mere faith, solid and solemn faith. We read in the text that they sang his praise. Music is the higher speech. There are times in our joy when we must sing—shout, rave, the world calls it; there are times in our religious consciousness when the only words that seem to fitly express our swelling emotion are such as “Hallelujah—praise the Lord: Hallelujah—praise the Lord.” Ecstasy and folly supreme to those who are not in the same mood, but, to men of kindred experience, music, a challenge to the fellowship of worship, and a call as of a trumpet blast to confess and honour the All-giving and Ever-giving God.

Once, O wanderer, you sang a religious hymn: do not drop your head now, and seem to forget all about it. You perhaps once sang in church, maybe you have come back to take up the strain where you dropped it, and to confess yourself a fool for your silence, seeing that God's goodness has never ceased to attend your life. You have never told your friends of to-day that once you were a religious man. We beg you to return, to take up the ancient hymn, and to sing God's praise once more, after ten or twenty years' silence. Will you? Your throat may be rusty for awhile; the voice will not yield very round and pleasant notes at first, but be steadfast, and the sweetness of the music will increase as you persevere.

Now the tone changes, the wind goes round to a bitter quarter—“They soon forgot his works.” Literally, they hastened to forget, they made speed to cleanse their memory of every religious recollection, they took down the broom and swept the house of their memory, so that no relic of the old religious emotion and utterances was left in the dismantled and impoverished soul. How easy it is to forget favours. How possible it is to give so many favours to an ungrateful person as to cause that person to imagine he has a right to claim them as his due. The giving of favours where gratitude is not kept up proportionately with the gift is a heart-hardening process. The Lord thus hardened Pharaoh's heart. If there had been fewer mercies and more scourges, Pharaoh's heart would not have been hardened. But who expects to find a man praying to-morrow morning because

the sun has risen upon his fields? We expect the sun to rise, and if he come with a cloud before his face we grumble and murmur. God has given us that sun so long and so punctually, that if he were withheld to-morrow morning we should complain bitterly because of the withholding of the usual light. The sun is a daily gift. Give us this day our daily bread, our daily light, our daily health, our daily life. At eventide God draws the black line around us and says, "The day is past and gone, and to-morrow is in eternity."

Some men have wonderful absorbing powers. They take any number of favours and never remember one of them. If this be so, as between man and man, what wonder that the charge should heighten in solemnity and gravity in its religious applications? It is the miracle which astounds the Omniscient. There are some things for which even God cannot prepare himself. From all eternity the whole drama of this human life lay outspread before him in every detail, in every accent of expression and every flush of colour, and yet he himself has been afflicted with surprise. Does it not seem to be so in the hearing of such words as these, namely, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." We have carried our ingratitude so far as to surprise Omniscience and shock Almightiness.

"They soon forget." Religious impression is most transitory. Beautiful as the morning dew while it lasts, it exhales, and we see no rainbow in the sky. It vanishes, it perishes, unless it be diligently seized and wisely deepened, yea, even cultured with all a husbandman's patient care, until it blooms into flower or develops into fruit, and is fit for the Master's plucking. What is forgotten so soon as religious impression? The first thing that we hear at the church door is a remark about the weather, and that remark will obliterate every hymn, anthem, and sacred reading; earnest prayer and high expostulation will go down in one inquiry about the fickle climate. Frail is the thread that binds us to heaven, mean and weak the threadlet that attaches

us to the altar and the church—a breath may break it, a little splutter of flame may crack it, and then our life may be lost.

Perhaps the catastrophe ended at forgetfulness? No; further reading gives denial to that happy hope. The reading is black, and proceeds thus: "They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert." They believed, they lusted, they sang, they tempted. It is such swift oscillation that we find in our own consciousness and experience of religious things. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. You a believing man, and now every passion aflame? You a singing man, and now you are tempting and mocking God by hard words and evil questions, and setting him tasks which you suppose to be above his power or beyond his grace? O Lucifer, son of the morning, how art thou fallen from heaven! Take care. Beware of dogs, beware of the concision, beware of evil workers, beware of bad companions, beware of relationships that please for the moment and then embitter all remaining time.

If the ancient people of God believed and sang—and then lusted, forgot and tempted God—who are we that we should of our own strength be more competent to reply to the challenges of the devil or to bear the burden of the world? Let us connect ourselves with the sum total of humanity; and read in the history of others what might have happened in our own career; and learn from the ruins of the ages that we, too, might have been thrown down in uttermost disorganisation and afflicted with incurable disease. Do not say that you are stronger than other men that have lived: humanity is one: history is lost upon us if we do not see in that which has occurred to others what may happen to ourselves. It is painful to think of the possibility of a believing man, a singing Christian, forgetting his God, so that when he hears the holy name he does not recognise it. And more distressing the still graver thought of a preacher after having preached to others becoming a castaway—falling from the pulpit into perdition, laying down God's hymn and psalm to take up the devil's ribald praise. How sad to think that lips that were opened in prayer to heaven should be

opened in homage to the devil—yet this same tragic thing is possible to every one of us. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

The backslider may not fall all at once : he falls from his singing into forgetfulness—nothing more serious. He falls into a negative state, he does not instantly lay down the hymn-book and begin to blaspheme God. There is an intermediate course. Thus—in the ardour of his piety he attends the sanctuary twice every Sabbath. By-and-by he says he is afraid to go out in the evening. Mark the beginning of a possible declension. That statement is perfectly true in some cases, and therefore we have no wish whatever to mitigate its force or to dispute its religious application in those instances. In the ardour of his early piety he attended the week-day services. He thinks that perhaps he has been neglecting his duty to his family by doing so, and therefore he surrenders them. Mark the beginning. Once he loved his own pastor above all others : now he wanders, he cannot bear to hear any one man more than three times. Mark the beginning. Once he was not afraid to say to others, “Come with me, I am going to a high mountain top to-day : the outlook is beautiful, the breeze is healthy, the companionship is inspiring—come with me and hear a man that in Christ’s name told me all things that ever I did : is not this an apostle of truth ?” And now when challenged with having heard that same man, he says, “Well, I did drop in now and then : I do not mean to say that I have often been there, but at the same time I—I——” What, you did drop in there ? Did you not come with both feet and with your head and your heart and your whole love, and was it not the happiest hour of your life you spent there ? O man, tell no lies : do not wriggle out of the condition.

Thus we go little by little astray. The gradient that goes down is not abrupt ; it is hardly measurable by the finest instruments, but it is going down still. Beware the first evil, beware the cooling process. Religion is nothing if it is not passion. Christianity is not a creed of words, it is an inspiration of life, it is a sacrifice.

How is it going to be with us ? We have forgotten God ;

let us pray to him to become the inspiration of our memory, that we may begin our counting where we left it off, and number all his mercies, until by their multitudinousness they confound and disable us. If we could remember any one instance of our life as we ought to remember it, the recollection of that instance would be a graphic, complete, final reply to every temptation to disbelieve and distrust our God. Now and again we do see our lives, we get a swift panoramic view of the wondrous past, and sometimes it so flashes upon our vision that we turn up the head glowing with a new life, and open our lips to offer a new psalm, a new anthem of gratitude to him who was our fathers' God, and who has never allowed us to know the hunger that had no bread, the thirst that could find no water, the weariness that could find no rest.

NOTE.

The Psalter in Hebrew is divided into five books, perhaps to make it uniform in this respect with the Pentateuch, or for some other reason of which we are ignorant, which end respectively with the 41st, the 72nd, the 89th, the 106th, and the 150th Psalms. Each of these Psalms ends with a doxology, or ascription of praise; the first three with the words *Amen and Amen*, the fourth with *Amen, Hallelujah*, and the last with *Hallelujah* only, as though praise unceasing were to form the occupation of the world of praise.

It is impossible not to observe that there is a certain principle or plan observed in the traditional arrangement of the Psalms, though it may not be very definite or very closely followed: for example, the first Psalm is clearly a kind of introduction to the whole book, and the last Psalms swell louder and louder the notes of praise, as though they were intended to be a fitting conclusion to a series of hymns and prayers which had so often been fraught with sorrow. . . .

As long as the career of mortal man is what it is in life, chequered by trial, danger, and bereavement; as long as the human heart is what it is, full of want and sin, and ever liable to sorrow, so long will the Psalms of David find their echo there, and not fail of earnest and anxious readers. The songs of Horace or Anacreon will please for a while, and will please an educated many or few, as the case may be; but a time will come when these will lose their sweetness for even their greatest admirers, and there must always be many whom they will fail to touch; but with respect to the prayers and hymns of David there can be no such thing as old age. They are the voice of man as man, and they are the truest expression of what must ever be permanent and unchanging—man's relation to God.

Nor is it necessary to look far for a reason, because the Psalms deal more especially with those aspects of human life in which all men are reduced to a common level, imminent danger, heart-rending grief, and a passionate longing for divine assistance. It is self-evident that many of the Psalms are the natural, spontaneous outpouring of the joy or sorrow of the writer. In this respect they are simply unrivalled, and stand alone among all the poetry of all nations and languages.—PROFESSOR STANLEY LEATHES, M.A.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we bless thee for the testimony of thy saints in all ages. All the houses of history have said, His mercy endureth for ever. In thy mercy we live. It is not only mercy, it is tender mercy. Who can tell how tender is the mercy of God? Thou wilt not break the bruised reed, thou wilt not quench the smoking flax; thou gatherest the lambs in thine arms, thou carriest them in thy bosom; thy loved ones are as the apple of thine eye unto thee: who then shall speak worthily of the divine mercy, or sing worthily of the divine love by which we were created and have been redeemed and shall be sanctified and glorified? Herein is the mystery of love. Other love we have known, but who can know in all its fulness the love of God which passeth knowledge? Help us to believe that we must grow in grace, and grow in wisdom, and continually ascend in all holy strength and power until we do more clearly apprehend the immeasurableness of the love of God. Oh that thy redeemed ones might no longer be silent! May they bear testimony to the tenderness and fulness of the mercy of the Lord; then shall the worst hear and wonder and inquire; on the right hand and on the left shall a man arise to say, Come, all ye that fear God, and I will declare unto you what he hath done for my soul. May this be an age of witness-bearing, may there still be living confessors, souls that shall say, God is love. We commend one another to thy tender mercy: keep us as in the hollow of thine hand: when the enemy would come in as a flood, lift up thy Spirit as a standard against him, and may he be made to know that God is for us, therefore none can be successfully against us. Pity those who are in great distress; heal the misery of our hearts; send forth thy Word, a light, a sun, a gospel from heaven, and let men answer it with contrition, broken-heartedness, and hope in the Cross of Christ. Blessed Cross! all-saving Cross! before it we daily, constantly, bow as before the altar on which alone our hope is founded. The Lord be with us, mightily, gently, sometimes almost visibly, so that in our souls there may be no fear. Amen.

Psalm cvii. 43.

"Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

THE SILENT CHURCH.

THIS is the higher wisdom. The text begins with the "wise." Wisdom is assumed,—not intellectual wisdom, which is often only another name for ignorance, but moral

wisdom,—wisdom of the heart. Whoso hath such wisdom, and will apply it in the observation of history, providence, mysterious interposition, shall come little by little to understand—not intellectually only, but morally, sympathetically; as if by identification with the thing itself—the lovingkindness of the Lord. Lovingkindness is a quality of kindness; tender mercy is a quality of mercy,—a peculiar, distinctive quality, an incommunicable quality. Kindness we see on every hand, and yet hardly ever see at all, in its pureness, and simplicity, and profoundest reality, because of admixtures that are human and almost inevitable. But in our searching after the heart of this kindness we come upon a quality which we distinguish by the name lovingkindness,—kind kindness, refined refinement, spiritual spirituality; the innermost thought and pulse and life of things. This is no rude judgment, no superficial or hasty criticism; as who shall speak of kindness, goodness, amiability: this is discriminating, critical consideration of innermost qualities: and the Psalmist is not ashamed of the redundance, “tender mercy,” “lovingkindness.” When love is sparing of language, when love tries to be concise, love puts its own eyes out, and inflicts a stab upon its own heart. Love has a right to be redundant; it flows like a river. This is more than Hebrew multiplication of words; this cometh of the necessity of things,—the heart seeing beyond kindness up to lovingkindness, beyond mercy to mercy that weeps hot tears, tender mercy, that will spare the smoking flax and the bruised reed. That is the text.

What are we called upon to do? To “observe.” But that is a scientific word. Certainly. There is no book more scientific than the Bible. Is not science called sometimes the art of observation? Here is a religious teacher who says, Be scientific—observe. Sometimes we want a microscope, sometimes a telescope; everything depends upon the object on which we are fixing our observation; if it be minute, there is the microscope; if it be distant, there is the telescope; what we have to do is to observe,—which few men can do. There are few born surveyors. There are men enough who can lump things, and speak about them in vague generalities, but to observe the Lord, to watch him, we must neither slumber nor sleep; we

must not look at broad lines, marking historical boundaries, we must look at all the fine lines, all the minute stippling, all the interior, wondrous touch, as of spiritual fingers; then we shall come to a just induction, to a soundly theological and rational conclusion concerning things. We cannot have the rough-and-ready man in the Church, and appoint him to tell us how love is going and how providence is shaping itself, and what lights are burning on the horizon. He may have his place, but it is not in the chair of criticism. He should be swift to hear, and be quite a stammerer in speech. Would God there were more stammering in certain sections of the Church, now being overburdened and noised to death by fluency! We are not to observe a little here and a little there, but we are to observe minutely, we are to observe in detail, to observe the little spectral shapes no larger than the hand of a man, and we are to observe them growing until the accumulation fills the firmament with promise of rain. It is delightful to find a word which binds us to a scientific policy. Isaac Newton said he was not aware that he excelled any one except it might be in the faculty of paying attention—shall we call it the faculty of observation? Darwin never slept; he was observing whilst he was dreaming; he left the object for a moment or two and came back to it to follow it on. And one would imagine from some of Sir John Lubbock's most useful books, packed as they are with information, that he had spent the most of his life in an ant-heap. He knows about ants—their policy, their economy, their method, their battles, their conflicts, their conquests—all their wondrous system of society. When a man observes God in that way, there will be no atheists. Atheism comes from want of observation,—not observation of a broad vulgar kind, as for example the eyes that take in a whole sky at a time without taking in one solitary gleam of light for careful and reverent analysis, but an observation as minute and detailed, and patient and long-continued, as a man has bestowed upon the habits of an ant. Who would go to a man who had never seen an ant, in order to learn from him the habits of the busy little creature? We smile at the suggestion. Yet there are men who go to professed atheists to know what they think of theology! That which would be ridiculous in science is supposed to be rather philosophical and

somewhat broad-minded in the Church. We go to experts. We are right in doing so. We ought to go to experts in the study of history,—not the broad vulgar history of kings, and rival policies, and sanguinary battles; but the inner history of thought, motive, purpose, spiritual growth, and those mysterious inventions which seem to have no beginning and no ending, circumferences without visible centre, centres without measurable circumferences,—the mystery of social movement.

The Psalmist dwells mainly upon four classes of people. Probably at that age of the world there were only four classes of people available for purposes of religious illustration. He deals with exiles, with prisoners, with sick men, and with men who see the wonders of the Lord in the great waters. So, in foreign lands, where there is no home; in prison, where the life is bound in cages of iron and brass; in the sick-chamber, where the life is worn down to one pain: and the great sea, which allows navies to pass but never to leave a footprint. This observing Psalmist opens the fifth book of the Psalter by saying that if men would only carefully observe all these things, they would come out of them singing and praising God, saying, In Babylon we saw thy goodness, and in the sea of the south we beheld how thy power lowered itself into pity and mercy.

The Psalmist does not neglect the extremities of men, when they are toiling and struggling and are put to all manner of distress. Indeed, he describes some of his clients, if we may so call them, as men who are at their wits' ends; literally, who are reeling, first on the right hand, then on the left, staggering, drunk, but not with wine. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." That is the want of men. We cannot do without the city. Solitude is good for a time; to the truly growing and reverent soul, solitude is essential, but it must be occasional, it must be well-apportioned, it must be seasonable; it must follow the battle, it must come after the strenuous strife with darkness and sin and misery and social helplessness: the summer holiday must come after the winter's toil; then is solitude most welcome, then the wilderness is a huge garden. But taking life in its breadth and generality,

men, plural Man, social man, wants a city to dwell in. The city is a poem, the city is a plan. Every citizen who pays attention to his limitations and responsibilities is more or less of a statesman. He learns something by having neighbours. He says, This is a party-wall. A common phrase; there is nothing in it in the ordinary specifications and covenants of builders and leaseholders, but looked into carefully it means,—I live on this side, and my neighbour lives on that, and if the wall should fall down we have both to build it. That is life in the city. The moment a man is joined by some other man, that man's rights are divided. If there were no other man but one in the solar system, no doubt he would be a person of great consequence—to himself: but the moment a little child came into that solar system his empire would be disputed, he must consider others, he must watch the child. Thus solitude is a larger condition than mere loneliness of the body. Solitude may in its larger signification point to one of those responsibilities the exercise of which develops the best and finest powers of the human soul. The cities are only symbols. The Lord allows us to bring our stone and timber and glass together, and allows us to make thoroughfares, and to have even corporations and councils; and he allows us to go forth at our full height as men of real civic importance: all the while he is saying, There is only one city that hath foundations: all these cities of yours are huts, places to dwell in for a day and a night, but on the third day you must be out. Blessed are they who declare plainly even in London that they seek a country out of sight, a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Live in your own city only, the hut which your own hands have made, and you lose the whole poetry of the situation. Every roof should mean in its higher symbolism a sky, every home should be the beginning of heaven. Poor wanderers!—were they the exiles returning from Babylon, and coming back to the Holy Land through every gateway accessible and passable? or is this a general description of the condition of human pilgrimage? Be it local, or be it general, there is the fact, that man can only do with a limited amount of solitude. Where he has to make his road every day, where there is only one little line of path, made by the feet it may be of beasts of prey, where there are no thoroughfares,

no broad open roads with beauteous fields on either side, speaking of warmth, and comfort, and hospitality, and home, man says, When will this end? where is the city, the place of habitation, the home? where can we talk together, talk one another out of our miseries, speak one another by tender eloquence into new liberties and larger rights?

The Psalmist dwells upon the limitations and restrictions of the man and the society, the whole idea of humanity: "Therefore he brought down their heart with labour"—literally, with misery "they fell down, and there was none to help." Sometimes we are all helpless. A question arises on which no one, even the whitest-haired, even the wisest, can shed light; then we fall down. What a striking, vivid image is this of the reality of things. We fall down. We can only stand in the degree in which we are wise, or capable, or conscious of ability to meet in some degree the pressure and agony of the situation: there comes a time when we fall down not in worship but in feebleness, and when though we be a multitude in number there is none to help. What did they do? "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." That has been his black Church through all the ages. Who ever went to a wedding to find the Lord? Who ever went out in high summer noon, saying, Let us pray? Then there seemed to be no need for prayer: but "in their trouble"—a church without windows, a church all blackness; when they could not see one another because of the denseness of the cloud—"they cried." The voice can go forth when the vision fails. We see God best in the darkness; we never knew the meaning of the words "I am the Resurrection and the Life" till we kissed the icy lips of the one child for whom the man waited outside to carry his ashes to the grave-pit. Then, when that voice fell upon us, we said, Lord, this must be true: yes, speak again—"I am the Resurrection and the Life." We needed some one to face that white enemy that blanches everything he looks upon; we spoke to him, and he mocked us with a grin; we implored him, and he trampled upon our prostrate form: but here is One that comes to him with majesty and says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." In trouble that gospel was announced. When the house was desolate because the

brother was dead, God opened that window in it through which the sisters saw all heaven's vitality.

The Psalmist, by a fine touch, artistic as well as spiritual, indicates how sometimes men are the mere sport of nature :—
“He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.” Can they not throw oil upon the waters? What oil would fill the Atlantic? Can the captain not say to the waves, “Peace, be still”? Yes, but the waves do not know him, though he be robed in uniform, and be gilded with medals. Can all the passengers not combine to say, We are men and you waves must not hurt us? Yes, they can do that, they can “call spirits from the vasty deep.” To call is one thing: for the spirits to come, for the sea to obey, is another. “Commandeth” is a large word; literally, he spake,—so common a word as that. All great deeds in the Bible have been done, not by commanding, which is a term indicative of high majesty, but by speaking, saying: “And the Lord said, Let there be light,” and the whole firmament gleamed with glory: “And the Lord said, Let us make man,” and man stood up almost a god: “The Lord spake,” and the sea fell into infinite undulations, and the ship was a creaking toy, now in the valley, now on the hill, in the trough and on the crest—absolutely helpless. It is instructive to note sometimes how we are almost the mere sport of nature.

The Lord “sent his word and healed them,”—literally, he sends his word, and heals them. Is this the word referred to in the expression “commandeth,” or spake? Should this word be printed with a capital W? Is it more than a vocable, a syllable? Does it live? Is this the Logos? There may be some who would starve the soul and say, Do not read such meanings into the Psalms: there are others who have read beyond the psalms into the gospels and are able to say, Now take back your New Testament light and hold it over your Old Testament object and read the psalm again:—In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God: and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us: he sent his Word. God is always sending; the Gospel is a sent blessing; and it is sent to be sent; around the world it goes, God's angel, God's voice, God's benediction.

Who is to say this? "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." "The redeemed of the Lord" is an expression that Isaiah made use of:—"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." The redeemed have been silent too long. We want a speaking Church; we want a Church of testimony. Every man can at all events relate his own experience, modestly and tenderly. A man may not be able to expound prophets and paraphrase sweet gospels so that a thousand men shall listen to him with more or less of interest, but every man can tell what he has seen and known and felt and handled of the Word of life. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Church, thou hast been silent too long. O assembly of the saints, why this speechlessness? You will be mocked, of course. If a man shall lock himself up in selfish contemplation and spend his life in self-analysis, then no notice will be taken of him; but if he come out and speak boldly, he will be taunted and sneered at and ridiculed and undervalued and misrepresented. Which is to be the guide of life, the overpowering inspiration of God, which says, Speak out! or the self-considering misinspiration of time and sense and self which says, Stay at home?

What shall be the result of this observation: Shall man see the power of God, the grandeur of God, the majesty of God? No: or through them he will see the further quality, the beauteous reality:—"Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." The exiles shall say, He was good to us in Babylon, though we knew it not at the time. The prisoners shall say, There was not one bar too many of iron or brass in the cage that held us: we see it now. Sick men shall say, In the sick-chamber where we mourned and pined in weakness God was love. And men who have been tossed to and fro on great waters shall say, The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and his also is the fulness of the sea. They come out of all this tumult of experience, not saying, God is great, God is majestic, God is overwhelming: hear them; they come out of all this tragedy, agony, loss, saying, "God is love."

Psalm cxy. 8.

"They that make them are like unto them ; so is every one that trusteth in them."

FALSE RELIGIONS.

THUS our manhood comes out of our religion. Whether that religion is false or true, it shows itself in the quality of manhood which it creates. We may therefore begin our religious arguments from the human side. All men cannot begin from the metaphysical points. Only a few human minds really care anything for pure metaphysics. Abstract preachers, therefore, preach to emptiness : concrete preachers may get at least an occasional hearing. In the Christian religion, and in every religion, we start the point from the concrete or human side, the question simply being, What kind of men does our religion make ? Without inquiring into the metaphysics of our faith, how does it come out in manhood ? If it makes really pure, noble, magnanimous, beneficent men, it is a true faith, however many of its documents it may have lost, and however much it may have been perverted in statement by its most devoted apologists. Here we seem to be upon a rock. That is the only test of religion, of orthodoxy, of doctrine. How does our faith incarnate itself ? What sort of man does it make ? How does it affect the shop, the counting-house, the family, the conscience, the individual, and the variously-related life ? We take our stand upon that solemn, practical doctrine. If the religious faith should result in little men, invisible souls in an other than physical sense, we cannot have a very cheering estimate of the faith. If the religious belief result in sectarianism, narrowness, bitterness, then the true God is not believed in. He may be accepted intellectually ; serial literature may have been created in his name, and all the machinery may be orthodox ; but if the soul be poor, weazened, sapless, musicless, although the right God may be believed in in

name, the faith is only nominal, there has been no participation in the divine nature, and the men who profess God without living God are idolaters, to whatever church they may belong. Reasoning of this kind throws a very solemn responsibility upon believers. If we find them narrow and little, conceited and pompous, selfish and sordid, what do we care for their catechism? We say, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" A catalogue of orthodox doctrines matched by a heterodox series of moral contradictions,—there is no irony so grim!

Retiring from the pronouns of the text in order to come to the substantive and particular, we find that the Psalmist is discoursing about false gods whom he denominates "idols": concerning them, he says, "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat" (vers. 5-7).

A false religion has all the outward signs of importance. A false religion could not live if it showed only its lying side. Even a lie could not live but for the one grain of truth that may be in it: it may be a grain of probability only, or even of possibility, but the lie owes its life, however brief, to the element of at least seeming truth, or possible truth, that may be in it. So with false religions: enumerate them, set them all out in a line, and one looks very much like another as to outward appearance. How long would a piece of lead be in the market-place if offered as a coin? Not one moment. But if treated, if smelted, minted, stamped, drilled, and made to look like a coin, it might deceive somebody, it might live a little while. To what would it owe its life? Not to its intrinsic quality, but to its appearance. So when you cite the religions of the world, and set them all in a line, you are perfectly right in saying, Behold them, and see how very strikingly they resemble one another. The counterfeit coin lives in its resemblance: take away this resemblance, and you take away its whole value; its similitude is its life. What wonder, then, that we find men

deceived by religions that are superficial, and merely human inventions, that have nothing to live upon that is of an eternal and divine nature? It is quite possible that the counterfeit coin may be more brilliant than the real coin. How did the five-pound note pass? Because it was like a five-pound note; the paper was the same, the mill mark was the same, the writing was the same; the resemblance was the reason of the successful deception. A piece of plain paper never would have done the work. No man ever took a piece of plain paper for a five-pound note. It is only when we come into the region or district of resemblances, minute particulars, that we are deceived. Sometimes even the eye of an expert is misled. The expert says, I think this is genuine. Afterwards it is proved to be counterfeit: how was the expert misled? By appearances. So you may take a false religion and a true religion, and if you go only by appearances the one may be strikingly like the other, and you may even say, What possible difference can it make which of them I take? It makes no difference, except the difference between falsehood and truth. Young minds, inventive, imaginative, audacious minds may be strongly tempted when health is good and fortune is prosperous to take up any religion that looks good. This is the continual and the subtle temptation that is addressed to all hearts. True religion cares nothing for appearances unless they represent realities. Religion does not value hands that cannot handle: the hand is judged by the handling. True religion does not say, Behold, here is a religion with eyes, therefore it must be a good religion: true religion holds up some object before those eyes and says, What is this? and the eye being so to say deaf and dumb, what is the use of it as a mere figure or outline or artistic success? Truth being real itself will only be content with realities.

This is the way in which all things must be tested. What is your religion doing? It is criticising, it is finding fault, it is living upon mischief; it is energetic in wrong ways, its purpose is to spoil the lives of others: then it is not the true religion. What is your church doing? Enjoying itself; curtaining itself in luxury, making a velvet path for its feet; seeing that the very air which it breathes is perfumed: the church hates

everything that is noisy, sensational, aggressive; it is a contemplative and slumbrous church. Then the true religion says, It is no church at all, and I now at God's altar excommunicate it—make room for it in the wilderness! Even a five-pound note, to recur to the homely illustration, is nothing in itself; it must represent something behind, it must stand in the place of solid bullion; it can only be a convenience, being lighter to carry than the metal: but if there be not an equivalent value in metal behind it, itself, though genuine, is a lie for practical purposes. So a man may boast of his faith, whereupon James will say, Can faith save him? unless it be representing something behind, something of intrinsic and divine value. Much is mistaken for faith that is not faith, that is mere intellectual assent, or mere intellectual indifference. A man does not believe things which he simply names with his mouth. He only believes those things for which he would die. What havoc this makes in the professed beliefs of the Church! Yet everything must be judged by the degree in which it realises its own pretensions. To pretend to have hands means power of handling, or it is a lie: to profess to have feet and yet to be unable to walk is to contradict your own statement: to have ears carved by an Angelo which yet cannot hear a thunderburst is to have ears that are visible falsehoods. Where we find hands we have a right to expect handling: where we find faith we have a right to expect morality, or service, or action: and if we with all Christian profession of an intellectual kind are not balancing that profession by actual, living, useful service, then let all the mockers of the universe taunt us, saying, They have hands, but they handle not. The taunt is not a mere taunt; it is a sneer justified by reason. If there were no hands we should pity the sufferer. Who expects to refresh himself from the branches of an oak tree? Yet if the hungry soul should come to a fig tree in the time of figs, and should find upon the tree nothing but leaves, hunger has priestly rights of cursing, hunger may excommunicate that tree from the trees of the garden, because it pretended to be a fruit tree and yet it grew nothing but leaves. There comes a time when the world's hunger will curse every pulpit that does not give to it the bread of life. That bread is substantial; that bread needs no argument to recommend it: let hunger and the bread meet,

and certain sacred results will follow. We must not lessen the quality of the bread. I know nothing about the "divinity" of Christ. I take that expression and nail it to the counter, and condemn it. It can be used by all sorts of people; it can mean various and totally different things. I believe in the Godhead of Christ. That can only mean one thing. Divinity! I have seen the word given out to poet, and philosopher, and dreamer, and seer: but Godhead, Deity, that must be a personal and undistributed term. So when men preach the Cross, I must know what cross it is that is preached. There are many crosses. there is only one true Cross, on which the Priest of creation died that he might save every soul of man. The cross that will not save is an idol that having hands handles not; having a mouth, speaks not; that looks its lie.

Religions that can be fully explained are inventions and quackeries. The Psalmist says so in verse 4—"the work of men's hands." Great power has no agencies that can be traced. We want to account for the power of this poet, or the power of that preacher, and power of that kind does not admit of exhaustive analysis. It is when we get to the point of mystery that we get to the point of explanation, paradoxical as the expression may seem to be. The work of men's hands is measurable work: what one man has done another man may do; what man has done man may undo: there is no security or permanence in the work of men's hands. Man no sooner builds his palace than nature begins to take the roof off. "The work of men's hands," so we say about catechisms and standards and creeds and idolised formularies; we encounter them with scornful laughter if they be pressed beyond a given and definite point:—Who wrote them? What right had their authors to formulate them? Who knows whether they will always continue in the same belief? Who can tell what the men who lived three centuries ago would say to-day if they were living? Let my faith go back upon the Bible itself, and rest upon that as upon a secure foundation; and let me be sure of this one thing, that if I go into the Bible in a prayerful, teachable spirit, saying, "Lord, help me to find thyself here, and thy way and thy will and thy love," though I be no priest or cunningly-instructed man, though I be but plain

reader, yet I shall by the might of the Spirit of God be brought into divine fellowship, and I shall come out of that Bible understanding if not its letter yet its holy saving spirit. Do not let us put the work of our own hands as an equivalent to God's thought. Who would be content to put down upon paper on which he worked an intricate calculation the first line as "Finite equal to Infinite"? Reason would decline to go further; reason would take its stand in opposition and say, Your fundamental proposition is an impossibility and a contradiction and a lie. Who shall say "Church equal to God," meaning by Church a building or an institution differing from other institutions of the kind? If you say, "The invisible Church, the redeemed Church, equal to the Cross," you begin to see the meaning of the deepest mysteries: for the Church is the Bride, the Lamb's Wife,—wondrous things hath he done for his Bride that he might present her unto himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing,—pure with heaven's pureness, radiant with the beginning of day. Wondrous are the operations of the human mind in this matter of finding possible or nominal equals in human reason, especially peculiar is the ecclesiastical mind. Was there ever a mind like Cardinal Newman's? He lives in a region into which some of us have never ventured to set foot; he has conducted controversies which most men would regard as more or less of the nature of cobwebs. He has been in extreme mental agony about things that we have hardly ever spent a thought upon. He says in his wonderful story, his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, that he was in the greatest possible perplexity about Romanism and Anglicanism until he saw the words of Augustine, "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*," and in a moment, he says, the light fell upon him and the Anglican theory was proved to be a delusion. Many of us could read these words of Augustine, and feel quite comfortable after having done so, but they tortured Newman. He says, "They sounded in my ears day by day, and at last I clearly saw that they pulverised (his own word) the Anglican theory of the faith."

Let us therefore take care how we put up theory against reality, invention against Scripture, and suggestion against

revelation. I want to live within the four corners of God's word. I believe that there is no resting-place, except inconsistency, between individualism and Popery. I would live so intimately with my Father that I can my very self, without priest, or minister, or teacher even, if I cannot avail myself of their services, find out what he means me to be and to do; I would be as a little child that could take my book and say, Father, I cannot read this but in thy light and under the power of thy Spirit, now let us read it together. And out of that perusal I would come richly laden with spiritual influence and spiritual blessing; yea, grammar itself should not keep me back from 'seizing by certain powers of the soul the inmost thought and sublimest purpose of God. Remember there always comes a testing time. We shall one day know which are true and which are false conceptions and views. We cannot always live in the region of conjecture. The true religion is not one guess superior to another guess, one conjecture overflowing and exceeding another. There must somewhere be the true religion, the real thought of God. Our progress upon earth must be a progress towards that inner ultimate truth. One man is a thousand miles ahead of another in his quest after that truth, but if all the men be in line then the last shall be as the first, and the first as the last, in thought, in sincerity, in purpose. Here is a field beautiful with golden wheat; the sun seems to linger upon it; it would seem as if the sun were amazed at its own creation, and saying as God said of the sun itself, "It is very good." Here is another field sown at the same time and by the same man, and there is nothing to be seen in it. How is this? Is nature eccentric? Is nature capricious? The reason is that one field was sown with wheat, and the other with sawdust, and sawdust never comes up. They were both sown? Certainly; but, oh! what shall the harvest be? So you have your theories. I say to agnostics and materialists and others who are not Christians,—I say you have your theories, inventions, suggestions, hypotheses: sow them, but, O sirs, what shall the harvest be? By that harvest let truth and falsehood be judged!

Psalm cxix. 19.

"I am a stranger in the earth : hide not thy commandments from me."

HUMAN PILGRIMAGE.

THIS is true of every human being. The term "stranger" has, however, various degrees of intensity. Take, for example, the child on the occasion of his first leaving home. He is a stranger among his schoolfellows ; but, with the characteristic simplicity and confidence of early life, he soon becomes contented and happy in his new associations. This is the lowest degree of intensity attaching to the term "stranger." Look at the young man leaving home with a view of settling in business. He is no longer the simple and trustful boy he was at school. The involutions of the human heart have been disclosed to him to some extent. Now there is a half-closing of the eye, which denotes suspicion ; and now there is a hesitation which signifies uncertainty as to consequences. He no longer adopts the first reading of a smile or the first interpretation of a genial tone ; he thinks there may be something behind all this which is designed to embarrass his interests or despoil his property. He feels himself a "stranger," and proceeds on the principle that every man is a rogue until he has proved himself honest. Thus in a fuller degree we have the meaning of the term "stranger." Follow the traveller into a foreign nation, and the meaning will be still further disclosed. He is unacquainted with the language, with the usages, with the spirit of the people. They may be plotting his plunder,—they may even be planning his assassination, yet he is ignorant of their designs. He sees ten thousand faces in the gay city, but not one of them brightens at his coming ; he hears ten thousand voices, but they utter no tone for him. If he is looked at at all, he is looked at as a stranger ; if he is spoken to at all, he is spoken to as a stranger ; and gradually

a sadness steals over his spirit, and in his heart there burns a desire to commingle again with his own countrymen. A still deeper shadow even than this darkens the term "stranger." Let the traveller pass the boundaries of civilisation, in quest of the sources of rivers, the riches of mountains, or the wild life of the forest. Every man he meets is a savage; every savage thirsts for his blood: he wanders under the shadow of forests where no human foot but his own has ever stepped; he penetrates valleys which have never echoed but to the scream of the eagle or the roar of the lion, and through which there howls a drear and hollow wind which chills him to the bone; he stands on hills made grey by uncounted ages; and, though brave of heart and strong of limb, yet a sense of desolation occasionally overpowers him, and extorts from him the plaintive exclamation—"I am a stranger in the earth."

Nor is this the worst that may befall him. Let him become invalided in the far-off land; let the burning fever lay hold of him, or let the plague taint his blood; let the days be days of pain and the nights be nights of weariness; then will he feel how much is meant by the term "stranger," and how inexpressibly dear to him are all the elements which constitute even the humblest home in his own land. Add to this the exhaustion of his funds; then look at him—then hear him: far away, prostrate, poor, he cries in the bitterness of his soul—"I am a stranger in the earth."

So much for strangeness of mere position, but all such strangeness very faintly represents the loneliness of the heart. A man may be a greater stranger in his own land, or even in his own family, than he can ever be on the wildest seas or bleakest hills. The traveller sighs for his home, and solaces himself with hopes of renewed association made the happier by the perils of absence; but the man who is a stranger at his own fireside shivers in a loneliness which has no hope from earth, and which would become despair but for the bow with which God has arched the storm, and declared the permanence of his regard for man. To carry in your breast a misunderstood heart is to feel every day the disadvantage and sorrow of a stranger. To be misunder-

stood by those who are afar off need not trouble the soul deeply ; but to be misapprehended by those who bear our name or carry our image is to be the victim of continual crucifixion.

Thus step by step we ascend to the highest meaning of the term stranger, and get a partial view of the condition of the Psalmist when he said—"I am a stranger in the earth." Regarding the text as presenting one aspect of human life, we may review the grounds upon which the assertion rests, and thus confirm ourselves in an earnest recognition of the Christian's true position in the present state of existence.

I am as a stranger in the earth because of the impermanence of my position. Here we have no continuing city. At any moment the posts of our tent may be struck, and we may be borne forward to another scene. "Death's shafts fly thick ; here lies the village swain, and there his pampered lord." The necessities of daily life may drive a man up and down with a harsh hand, but how secure soever his position there is one pursuer who can neither be bribed nor deterred. Look at yonder castle on the steep hill-side. Its walls are thick, its defences are strong. The rich man's gold has thrown the charms of art upon the ruggedness of nature ; garden and fount, glade and brook, birds of rarest plumage and sweetest song, broad paths on which the sunshine blazes, and hidden tracts on which it only glints, wreathing the shadows into tassels and tangles of every shape ; all that money can buy or taste devise may be found in that hill-side home :—

"This castle hath a pleasant seat ; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here."

Yet into this enchanted ground the fell pursuer finds his way, and through all the summer light brings the lordly owner to the house appointed for all living. Truly the rich man, as well as the poor, is a "stranger in the earth." We are strangers and sojourners on the earth, as all our fathers were. We are as

flowers in the morning, but at eventide our very root has withered away. The great men of the city die, and in a few years their names are forgotten ; the poor man dies, and soon none can tell which clod of the valley was he.

I am as a stranger in the earth because of my life and language. If there be but a slight difference between the Christian and the secularist, it is because the Christian has not been "transformed by the renewing of his mind," for though bearing a new name he carries an old nature. We instantly detect a foreigner by so small a sign as an accent or a posture ; and the Christian is known to men of the world by a glance or tone, by a frown or smile. It should be the Christian's business to live down by a sublime, never-wavering faith all the little and selfish maxims and policies of the world, and to inaugurate an era of inextinguishable enthusiasm in relation to the heavenly life. This he will do most effectually not by destructive criticism, but by a quiet, all-penetrating, and all captivating example. Many men are not merely powerless, but self-defeating, when they begin to criticise ; their words are as weapons of war ; but when they live their convictions, they work as powerfully yet as silently as the all-transforming light. This should be the Christian's business as a stranger—to operate as the light, not as the lightning—to master men by attraction, and not by reprobation.

I am a stranger in the earth because of the perils to which I am exposed. The adventurous explorer feels that he is in constant danger. A stride may bring him upon the nest of a serpent ; behind the next crag a tiger may crouch ; and when he stoops to drink of the brook the imprint of the lion's paw arouses him to watchfulness. It is thus in moral pilgrimage. The way lies through a troubled region. Our adversary the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Our feet cross the slimy track of the serpent, and our inexperienced eyes are often tempted by an angel's light covering the infernal darkness of a devil. There is poison in every stream ; there is a worm at the heart of the fruit ; there is a thorn under the leaf of the flower. Again and again, every day, we are driven into a torturing consciousness of our ignorance and weakness in the

world ; and the long-drawn sigh, could men rightly interpret it, is continually telling the bitter story of the heart. The track of the foe is everywhere. We feel a horrible sense of his omnipresence. He gleams in the joys which beckon us to their sunny pastures ; he skulks in the darkness which invites us to repose ; his voice mingles with the song which charms the young listener ; his shadow darkens the very hearthstone of home. When we pray he seeks to becloud the mind and beget mistrust in the heart, and when we open the Holy Book he tempts us to think that no letter of it was written by God. The presence and power of such a foe make us feel that we are but strangers, still far distant from the land which is full of light and peace.

A man must feel all this in order to realise the help which God is prepared to accord him. His heart must be quite given up to home-sickness. He must have "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." Then he will know what the Psalmist meant when he said, "Hide not thy commandments from me." He meant what the mariner means when he carefully consults his chart, while the night storm rocks the vessel and the sea threatens to swallow it up in anger. He gave up the direction of his own way, and cast himself upon the wisdom and power of God.

"Hide not thy commandments from me:" these words abound in practical suggestion. They show, for example, that God has not been unmindful of the earthly life of his saints, but provided for its effectual protection. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way." Here is the speciality of divine interposition. God watches each man as if he were the only man to be watched. "He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness." No good man need be at a moment's loss as to the direction of his way. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." If there be a reverent pause, it shall be of brief duration. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." These words save us, if we rightly heed them, from practical atheism. Like Enoch, we may "walk with God ;" like Job, we may say, "He knoweth

the way that I take;" we may say with Isaiah, "He giveth power to the faint:" and with Paul we may affirm, that though we are "cast down," yet we are "not destroyed." Is it nothing to have God continually at our right hand? Is it a small thing to walk in the light of the divine countenance? Is it a trifle to be able to hide one's self in the cleft rock until the calamities of life be overpast? "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" This is a false testimony, for "the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people."

There are, then, two different ways of meeting the exigencies of our position "as strangers in the earth." We may take life entirely into our own hands; we may grope in blindness and flounder in a most pitiful impotence; we may shut out God; we may quench the Holy Ghost, and go headlong to perdition; we may do all that; we may make fools of ourselves if we like! Or we may place ourselves under God's direction, leaning not to our own understanding, but resting in the Lord's grace and wisdom, walking in ever-brightening light, and hastening to the unclouded and eternal vision of the Lamb in heaven. These ways are before us. It is not in God to ignore man's moral nature; he leaves him, therefore, the option of going to hell if he so prefer!

This subject should peculiarly impress the hearts of the young. Life is to you an untrodden path. You know not its sinuousness, its countless disappointments, its bitter hardships. Start well! God's commandments will be a light unto your feet, and a lamp unto your path.

"'Twill save you from a thousand snares
To mind religion young."

"Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding." Get wisdom at the outset: "Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble."

The subject, too, should deeply affect the hearts of parents. Your children start their career from your fireside. Your maxims,

principles, and examples enter into their notions of life, and to a large extent determine the tone of their being. Would you like your children to launch into the troubled life-sea without chart, or compass, or guide of any kind? If you are yourselves willing to risk the consequences of infatuation, should not the eternal interests of your children awaken your solicitude, and call you to repentance and truthfulness of life? I plead with you for their sakes! Think of the horribleness of a child learning atheism from his own father! Ponder the awful possibility of a father opening the gate of hell that his own child may enter! You cannot do God's work upon the child's heart, but you can do the work which is next best. You cannot force your child along the right way, but you can associate his earliest and tenderest memories with reverence for God's commandments, faith in God's Son, and all the charms of a beautiful and magnificent example.

To you who are walking in the light of God's countenance it may appear superfluous to say, "Go forward!" You have tested the rottenness of all the staves which you have provided for your own support; they have broken and pierced your hand! The way has been long, hard, barren, and dreary to many of you, yet every step of it has been taken by the feet of Christ, and as you move along the rugged path you may hear him saying, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Ah me, the end! We know not how suddenly we may come upon it; the shadow is lengthening so rapidly that it cannot be long till eventide; there are tokens of approaching sunset; the air is cooler, the sky is grayer, there are masses of cloud lying on the eastern horizon—let it come. Time can take nothing from us that is of any essential importance to our well-being; it can touch only the carnal: while it is plundering us with one hand, it is enriching us with the other. Being confident of this we calmly abide the oncoming of night—there will be a short sleep, and then—then the long summer day which has no sunset hour.

Psalm cxix. 46.

"I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed."

GUILTY SILENCE.

A SILENT religion, or a speaking religion—which shall it be? David says, "I will speak;" what do we say? Too often we resolve that we will keep silence.

As Christians, there is hardly a more important practical inquiry which we can put to ourselves than this:—How far are we guilty of keeping silence on the most vital and sublime of all subjects, namely, the divine testimonies? Take, as a great fundamental truth, this fact, that Christians are the treasurers of the divine testimonies. That is to say, Christians know what God has revealed on all the subjects which involve the pardon, the purity, and the peace of man: they profess to have read all his testimonies, to have felt them in their regenerating and enlightening power; and professing all this, the question is—are they not bound, by the most powerful considerations, to communicate all they know, and to be themselves God's testimonies translated into human life?

The difference between a silent religion and a speaking religion is the difference between a dead Church and a living one. Living men must speak, earnestness cannot be dumb; if it pause for a moment it is but the pause of a gathering stream, which deepens that it may flow with a stronger rapidity. Silence may be ruin. The neglect of an opportunity of speaking the right word may not only imperil, but absolutely destroy, the destiny of a soul. This matter, then, of silence or of speech, as relating to our

religious life, becomes a test question, by which we may determine the reality of our spiritual condition.

The theme on which David says he will speak is God's testimonies. Has he chosen a barren topic? Has he pitched his tent on a fruitless land, or by an empty channel? Look at the range, the explicitness, and the emphasis of those testimonies, and you will say that never did man choose so fruitful, so abounding a theme. The fact is that there is not a single aspect of life which lies beyond the circumference of the divine testimonies. God has anticipated everything, provided for everything. David, then, is ready for all occasions, for all men, at all times, and in all places. Does he enter the palace: God has special messages to kings concerning righteousness, equity, oppression, wisdom. Does he encounter sorrow: some of the richest and tenderest testimonies of the divine revelation are specially addressed to those whose eyes are blinded with tears, and in whose breasts there is the tumult of a great woe. Does he enter the family circle: God calls himself Father, and tells us of a love more enduring than all the affections of human kind. Does he see wickedness: God's testimonies burn unquenchably against all wrong: in short, God's testimonies provide for every exigency of human life, for every aspect of human experience, for every anticipation of human hope. Nothing has been omitted; in this book there is provision for everything. The light nourisheth all things, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall. Here is a word for kings, and here a word for the lowliest subject; here a psalm for joy, and here sympathy for woe; here is rest for the weary, and here stimulus for the indolent; here is work for health, and here is balm for sickness; here is a word for the hoary, and here a hymn for little children; great trees are here and little flowers, mighty rivers and threading rills, great lights and glimmering sparks. What, then, is the urgent practical lesson to be deduced from all this affluent provision? If there is one lesson clearer than another suggested by these circumstances, it is that we are left without excuse if we fail to speak of the divine testimonies. Opportunities occur every day. Circumstances arise under which no words can be so beautiful, so touching, so pithy, so real. Not a day elapses without securing

to every Christian an opportunity of preaching the gospel. But are not Christians too often dumb when their voices should be lifted up as thunder? Are they not silent when their testimony should be pronounced with the sweetness of persuasion and the distinctness of a trumpet peal? Verily on this ground every man is guilty. God hath a long, black, unanswerable account against the doing of every one of us. At best we have pronounced our testimony in a hesitating tone; where we ought to have been emphatic, we have trembled; where we should have blighted error with a solemn, personal, experimental witness, we have availed ourselves of an evasive phraseology, and lost opportunities of re-pronouncing the mysterious revelations of God.

What is the excuse which is pleaded in extenuation of this course of irresolution and timidity? The excuse may be thus expressed,—“we are so afraid of cant.” Are we, indeed? As a matter of fact there are some people who are never so guilty of canting as when they are running cant down. There is a great deal of cant talked against cant. Many a man makes himself a reputation for sincerity by talking loudly against the cant of other people. But is there no medium between cant and an ungrateful silence? Is there no medium between counterfeit coin and covetousness? Suppose a man talking after this fashion,—“I should have given something to that cause, but I do so much dislike base coin; I should have given bread to that hungry child, but I do so dislike poison; I should have sung that grateful psalm, but I do so detest profane songs; I should have preached the gospel to that dying man, but I am so afraid of hypocrisy.” Would such talk be rational? Would such talk be tolerated by earnest men? Yet, when we plead that Christians should own their Lord, and maintain the honour of his Cross, they do often leave him to the mockers’ scorn, lest they should be deemed guilty of cant! Let us learn that there is an earnest word, that there is a way of speaking an earnest word earnestly, and that it is our bounden duty to speak of God’s testimonies with an enthusiasm beyond all shame. Yet why speak of this as a duty? Is duty the right word to apply in setting forth the act of speaking on behalf of Jesus Christ? We might recall that word duty, and for it substitute all that suggests privilege and

honour and joy, beyond all estimation. If men only speak because speaking is a duty, there will be a constraint and poverty and pointlessness about their testimony which will deprive it of all vital influence; but if men speak because the divine fire is burning in them, because they feel themselves under the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, then their words will be characterised by a brightness, a force, an emphasis, and an unction, which will compel the attention of the most stubborn auditors.

David says he will speak of the divine testimonies before kings. Mark these words—before kings; he will not merely speak in a cottage meeting, or in some hidden room where only poverty, ignorance, and barbarity hide their heads, but before kings—before his equals. Here is a most important lesson for the Church of to-day; for while Christian men are putting forth—and rightly putting forth—strenuous efforts for the benefit of the working classes, are they not in danger of neglecting a duty nearer home? It is a question for serious consideration whether, in our anxiety for the welfare of strangers, we are not overlooking those nearest to us, and therein committing a serious error. If it is right to speak of God's testimonies at all, it is right to speak of them to our equals and associates, and to those by whom we are immediately surrounded in the occupations and pursuits of daily life. We miss many opportunities in the mart of business, on the crowded streets, in the busy market-place. You need not commit yourselves to what is technically known as "preaching;" there is a way of doing so which may really do more mischief than good, but there is also a way of speaking a word, or turning a conversation, which will lift up daily life into a light above the brightness of the sun. There are many curious and startling inconsistencies perpetrated in connection with this matter of not being faithful to the divine testimonies. We have before the mind's eye a man who is a large employer of labour. He might have an immense moral influence over those who work in his employment. By a wise word here, and an encouraging word there, he might achieve untold good. That man is a member of the church, but his own servants are perfectly unaware of his piety until they see his name advertised as a speaker at a religious meeting. Is this right? Is this bearing

a testimony concerning God? Is it rational that where a man could do most good he should never attempt to do any at all? What is the excuse usually pleaded upon this point? It is the objection to mingle business and religion. Who wishes to mingle business and religion? Raise your thoughts, for a few moments soar above a miserable, shop-keeping world, ascend the hills of eternity, and then remember that to those who earn their daily bread at your hands, you never spoke one word concerning the bread which endureth unto everlasting life! You practically denied God's name in commerce; you never saw on your gold any image and superscription but those of Cæsar! We need more and more enlightening on this subject of the connection between religion and business. Business should be religion, and religion should be business. Sunday is one of the seven days, and not a day by itself standing in perfect isolation. The testimonies of God are for every day in the week. If Christianity be a mere creed, if it be something outside of a man, if it be a mere accident in the development of moral life, then you may keep it for show-days; if it be a picture which can be hung upon a wall, then you have a right to put a screen over it when you wish: but if Christianity is a life and not a thing, if it is in you as a well of living water springing up into everlasting life, then you simply cannot disassociate it from business; you may as well talk of disassociating the atmosphere from your lungs, or of severing a star from its central sun.

If a man thinks that speaking God's testimonies simply implies that he must say so much religion to-day, and quote a prescribed portion of Scripture to-morrow, that man is leading an artificial life, certainly not a life of true union with Christ. It is quite possible to be quoting Scripture, and the sayings of wise men and good men, without the heart being engaged in the holy exercise of endeavouring to elevate the moral condition of man. There are two ways of doing everything. Christ should be our example; as he went about doing good we should put our feet into his footsteps, and re-deliver the tender and enlightening words which issued from his pure lips.

There is something very marvellous, yet not altogether inex-

plicable, about human shame in relation to the divine testimonies. There is no allowable topic of human conversation of which even good people are more ashamed than the gospel. They will talk upon any other subject more readily, more fluently, more intelligently, and more courageously. This is a circumstance loudly calling for consideration. Why should men be ashamed of God? Why should the creature shun the Creator? Why should the beneficiary forget the benefactor? To add to the difficulty of explaining this circumstance, it is to be recollected that the persons now spoken of are not ashamed of the gospel as a system of truth; that is to say, they are not ashamed of theology in the sense in which they are ashamed of experimental religion. Christianity may be looked at as a department of theology, or Christianity may be looked at as an element in our own spiritual life; in the former sense it may be discussed not only with intelligence, but with enthusiasm, while in the latter it may be ignored and shunned. Not only are such persons not ashamed of the gospel as a system of truth, but to a certain extent they are not ashamed of the gospel as vindicated by their own conscience and experience. If interrogated as to what they feel, they will instantly reply in a manner which might satisfy the most zealous saint; when the matter is pressed upon them, and they are made to follow rather than to lead, there may in reality be but little fault to find with their spirit and expression; but when they are left entirely to themselves they neglect to initiate an argument for the necessity and importance of immediate personal attention to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How, then, is all this to be accounted for? The argument which is derived from a foolish fear of what is called cant has been already suggested; but there is another consideration which ought not to escape attention in determining this subject; namely, that in our day gospel and sect have become synonymous terms. It is upon this ground that many worthy people do feel most acutely the difficulty and delicacy of their position. Let a man, for example, in a railway carriage, in a place of business, or in a scene of social festivity, introduce the subject of religion, and instantly his hearers will begin to speculate as to what section of the Christian Church he belongs. The probabilities are that

they will at once conclude that he is a Methodist. This, doubtless, is a great and well-deserved compliment to our honoured brethren of the Methodist persuasion. It implies a recognition of their fervour, zeal, and devotion, which puts to shame the pretensions of many other Christian bodies. Would that in this respect all the Lord's people were Methodists. Our reticence may be our disgrace; our sealed lips may be a crime, not an honour.

If those who have felt the power of the gospel will not speak of it, who will? The claim of Almighty God upon our best service is not only emphatic, but indisputable and most solemn. "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world; ye are cities set upon a hill." Everywhere, then, we find responsibility associated with blessing, and if we who know how to do good do it not, our sin is marked by a double aggravation. If the believer will not speak of the divine testimony, the unbeliever will! If there is silence in the Church, there is no silence in the camp of the enemy! The devil knows no leisure. All bad men seem to find rest in toil, and to recruit their energies by spending all their strength. If, then, the devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, let us, at least, follow him if we cannot outrun him, and bear witness to the fulness, freeness, and influence of the grace of God as manifested in Christ Jesus our Lord.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

As it is impossible within the available space to go through the Psalter in detail (a work I earnestly desire to undertake) I have resorted to a method of condensation which finds a place for many an otherwise excluded passage. This is noted in order to explain change of plan.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy meaning concerning us is one of love, though the cloud is often great and thick, and we cannot see through it. Lord, increase our faith! That is the large life, the noble existence, the life that reaches unto heaven. We would not have our sense-life increased: there is nothing in it but beginnings: in it there is no satisfaction but that which leads to still deeper hunger; but the life of our faith we would have enlarged and glorified, so that all things may be ours in Christ—all time, all space, all opportunity for being and doing good, for growing in wisdom, in the knowledge of the Lord God Almighty, and in the service of all who may be less favoured than we are. This is our desire; thou wilt crown it with an abundant answer, thou wilt seal it with great honour. Thou hast sown us down here in this low place like seed; thy meaning is that we should take root here, and leave the root behind, whilst the golden fruit should be gathered in the skies. We bless thee for a growing-place, but we want it only for the root: all the influences of heaven itself must gather around our head and make the fruitfulness of life a great joy to thyself. Herein art thou glorified, that thy servants bear much fruit. Give us to feel how long is the seedtime of God. We have seen nothing else yet. Thou didst go forth to sow long, long ages since, and thou art sowing still—sowing men, women, and children all over the land, and thy meaning is that they should grow up into all heavenly beauty and fruitfulness and be gathered into the garner of the skies. Alas! some are fallen by the wayside, and others in stony places, and others have no deepness of earth, so that they soon wither away: is there not a remedy in heaven for all this—some great answer of God to the peculiar circumstances of men? We will not judge: we will pray; we will not condemn: we will assist; be this our spirit, O thou Christ of the Cross, who didst take upon thyself the form of a servant that thou mightest save the world. Enable us to be quiet, solemn, thoughtful, in the presence of life's dark mystery. We bless thee for all fleeting joy, for the transitory lights which make us glad for a moment; but still when they come and go there is left the eternal mystery—What is Life? what is God? Check our impatience; displace it by noble reverence and with the sweet modesty which bows its head and waits in calm tranquillity until God's time be come. Meanwhile, we pray for one another that we be not hindrances to one another, but helps; that we throw no cloud upon each other's path, but all possible sunshine and laughter and true joy. Look upon us in various stages of life. Look upon the old man and tell him that old age is impossible upon earth to him who is rooted in God: for the growing days do but bring heaven nearer, and heaven is

eternal youth. Speak to the busy man whose head is full of schemes and plans, who is even now, though in the sanctuary, buying and selling and getting again, arranging his journey and perfecting his plans; and tell him that the whole earth is not worth getting, that having got it he has bound a burden upon his back and blinded himself to heaven. Give him heart and hope to win honest bread, and plenty of it; give him what is needful for the true nurture and culture of his life, and give him the power of setting things down as though he did not want them, and setting them away from him at a long distance, as though he were afraid of their contagion. Thus may he use the world as not abusing it; thus may he stand above it, and rule over it, and hold it as God's trustee. Look upon those to whom life is all crookedness, and darkness, and disappointment; they know not why they were born: they see nothing and hear nothing as it really is; their life is one succession of mistakes; their days are but illuminated nights, they stumble at noonday, and are afraid of that which is high; they have no faculty, no sense, no grip of things; they wander and look around blindly; they put out their hand, and seize but the empty air. The Lord pity such; make of them what can be made of them: it lies within the scope of thine almightiness to save even such. Bless the little boys and girls—the sweet flowers of life; the little things that turn away attention from those high themes which never can be solved or adjusted, but whose discussion leads to mental distraction and final melancholy. The Lord give grace unto the children; the Lord save them from the bitter east winds that blow upon their young souls; the Lord give them early wisdom, and a long life to enjoy the good beginning. Remember our sick ones. Many whom thou lovest are sick. They thought to be well on God's day. They said, Sickness can endure but the poor cold six days; on God's day we shall be young again and hale, and ready to join in the public psalm. Keep them; heal them; give them to see that thou hast yet more than they have yet seized, more than they can ever appropriate. Then our loved ones who are far away—beyond the sea, in foreign lands, in the colonies, on the sea, in trouble on the sea: the Lord's eye be upon them for good, and the Lord pour down through all the winds that roll around the earth messages of comfort and love, and send secretly angels that shall assure the heart that all is well. Give us joy in the perusal of thy Book; give us some touch of heaven whilst we tarry in thine house: may thine altar be as thy throne, and through thy Cross, O Christ, may we see thy crown. Amen.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD AS REVEALED IN THE PSALMS.

I.

WHAT is the conception of God as revealed in the Psalter? We hear a great many musical instruments, and voices of many qualities and tones; we hear the sea commanded to roar, and the fulness thereof; and the clouds praise the Most

High as they pour their gentle and gracious rains upon the thirsty ground. Who is the God to whom all this praise is ascribed? We are moved by the enthusiasm of the actors in this great pageant of song, but whom do they worship? What is his name? In order to join their songs intelligently, we should wish to know the God of the Psalmists and the conception of his nature formed by those who adore him. Excluding, therefore, all the rest of the Bible from our purview, the question we have to ask is, What is the conception of God as revealed in the Psalms of David and his fellow-singers?

The first conception would seem to be concerning the kingliness, the majesty of God. There is a pomp about the expression that is in harmony with the finest ideas which the human mind can form respecting royalty. The mind is thus elevated by the very quality of the thought. There is nothing in all the conception of God revealed in the Psalter that depresses the mind, or limits the thought, or chides the efforts and darings of imagination: on the contrary, everything in the Psalms relating to the Divine Being says, Stand up in all the fulness of your manhood, for you are called to worship the Great God, the King above all gods. Surely no small intellectual benefit accrues from a challenge like this. Worship is not an easy effort—a mere breathing, a state of intellectual indifference, a sighing of sentiment, an assenting to propositions which some other men have formed: worship is a sacrifice—an expression of pain, self-surrender, profound obeisance, and an assurance that all words are too poor to express the praise due to the Great King. We are not now asking whether the conception is right or wrong: our one concern is to make ourselves clear as to what the conception is. Hear, then, some such words as these:—"The Lord is king for ever and ever" (x. 16); "The kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations" (xxii. 28); "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (xxiv. 10); "The Lord most high is terrible; he is a great king over all the earth" (xlvi. 2). The men who formed these conceptions were not little men; they were great men, and they were all on fire! There was no coldness in the ancient worship as it is revealed in the Psalms: all was ardour, passion, sacrifice; every temptation was blown away

by the tempest of this noble enthusiasm. Probably this is the very first idea that ought to be formed respecting God, namely, that he is a great King—Sovereign—King of kings—Lord of lords. Not the first idea in the sense of being the elementary idea, but the very first that challenges and satisfies the imagination when most inspired and most reverently audacious. We must have a conception of God that fits the universe. To attach a small name to so infinite a quantity would be an irony which the feeblest mind might despise. What, then, will do for circumstances which in themselves are so grand—an immeasurable firmament; universe beyond universe; innumerable millions of worlds whose velocity never can be stated in figures; white day, pure light; starry night ablaze with jewels; pomp, uniformity, vastness, minuteness, regularity, fruitfulness? Who owns it? Here we cannot be content with a little or trivial answer; here words may be piled without hyperbole; here eloquence may thunder without approaching the vulgarity of noise. This universe was never made by a being less than itself—than what it is in size, bulk, splendour, resource. When, therefore, the Psalmists come down into the church, saying, Wake the harp, sound the trumpet, let the sea roar and the fulness thereof! we say, Why?—Because we are praising him who made all heaven and earth, and all that in them is: “He is the King of glory.” The answer satisfies us intellectually. We find no disharmony between a practically infinite universe and a really infinite Sovereign. We are not committing ourselves to any theory: we are rather asking concerning one, and then we are to proceed to consider how far it fits the facts which are patent to every observer.

Granted, however, that God is King, what are some of the inferences which flow from this conception of the divine royalty? The idea is that God is seated upon the circle of the earth; that high above all things is the ever-glowing, ever-dazzling Shekinah; that God’s throne is on the apex of the universe. Granting that all this is true, what inferences ought to flow from an appropriation of that spiritual doctrine? Look at the Psalms for an answer. We will ask the Psalmists if they were faithful to their own conception. What did they teach, and to what responsibilities did they expose themselves by their teaching?

That is a fair inquiry. By this means we shall discover the practical effect of the conception of God's nature formed by the Psalmists. If it end in mere song, however melodious—in acclaims, however piercing and noble—it will be no concern of ours to meddle further with its transitory worship; but if the conception of God formed by the Psalmists enabled them to hold life with a kingliness all their own; if their conception of God made themselves but a little lower than God, because they were formed in his image and likeness; if their conception of God enabled them to move about all the lines of life with dignity and intelligence, and beneficence and peacefulness, it ought to be the concern of a troubled world to know what that conception was, and to attempt its immediate and perfect realisation. So this is no barren inquiry in religious archæology.

One of the first inferences which the Psalmists drew from the royalty of God was the fact of a complete National Providence—a divine handling of nations. It is possible to be so critically minute as only to see the one man, or the individual men, and not to aggregate them into a new and larger identity, called society or nationality. It was a singular thing that the Psalmists seized the idea of confederation, commonwealth, human unity. They were not content to know that God was the providential guide of this particular man or that: they brought men together in their supreme aggregation, and spoke of them as families, tribes, nations, peoples, kindreds, and tongues. Hear these words: "He is the governor among the nations" (xxii. 28): "He is terrible to the kings of the earth" (lxxvi. 12). Here is statesmanlike grasp of things in the very midst of singing, and what to some minds would seem to be sentimental worship. A fearful expression is this, and yet full of gladness when rightly apprehended—"He is terrible to the kings of the earth." From great men he expects great things: where there are thrones there should be personal majesty, moral sovereignty, monarchical grandeur of character. He will plunge the kings of the earth into deeper depths than common men can ever reach, if they be not faithful to their stewardship, if they sacrifice to their presumption and their vanity. But the whole idea of national providence accrues from this conception. Whole peoples are

watched. A marvellous mystery this, that there should be personal government on the part of God, so that each man is treated as if he were an only child, and yet that there should be national government on the part of heaven. A beautiful idea, too—a bringing together of men into a living commonwealth; a writing across the forehead of the nations: Ye are not your own; ye that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak; no man liveth unto himself. Then, on the other side—namely, the penal—how awful is the thought as revealed in the Book of Psalms that God punishes nations in their totality! He locks up the nations within their own boundaries until they go mad with exasperation and despair. They say they will burst their bands: and, lo! they are tugging at wrought-iron which they cannot break; they will go forth: and, behold! their caparisoned steeds fall dead beneath them; they will blaspheme the Most High, and take affairs into their own hands: and they stagger, and rot, for they defied the heavens. The history of nations is before us, accessible to every intelligent student: see if it be not true that whole nations have been thus handled, that over the neck of nations have been thrown invisible reins held by invisible hands.

Following this first thought, the Psalmists were not slow to recognise the fact of universal judgment as a necessity of universal kingship:—"Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously" (xcvi. 10). And again:—"He is the Lord our God: his judgments are in all the earth" (cv. 7). This gives a sense of security to things. We are not living upon a cloud; we are not condemned to nourish ourselves upon the foam of the waters: we are called to conceive of righteousness at the centre of things, righteousness at the head of things, the spirit of judgment in the whole circle of things. That is the conception of the sweet singers of Israel. So they were more than singers: they were philosophers; and philosophy is incomplete until it becomes a psalmist, a singer. Truth is but struggling with its burden until it so far conquers that it must of necessity sing. Music is the completion of philosophy. We are called to accept this doctrine of the divine judgments. The acceptance of it relieves us from the necessity of personal criticism.

in many directions. We are delivered from the exasperation consequent upon judging one another. We commit our way unto the Lord. We say: God will judge—why should we trouble to criticise? We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and every man shall receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil; seeing therefore that we are to be judged ourselves, why should we judge one another? Thus we are enabled to look tranquilly upon some scenes which otherwise would dispossess us of all religion and drive us wild with ungovernable excitement. What otherwise could we do in the presence of slavery, oppression, tyranny, cruelty? We exclaim against them, but make no impression; we plead for the down-trodden, and are answered with scorn: what refuge is there for us but in the thought that a great process, requiring long time for its evolution, is being conducted, and that not a single oppressor, tyrant or cruel heart can escape without record in heaven? We are charged to speak comfortably to those who are prison-bound, in distress, in sorrow of heart—saying, Sorrow endureth but for a night, joy cometh in the morning. There is a fearful awakening for the unrighteous, the untrue, and the unjust! If you are sure of being right, suffer on, knowing that Christ also suffered wrongfully; bear up bravely, endure patiently: yours will be a short night, and no sooner will the morning light shine upon you than you shall forget its darkness, and thank God for its discipline. So out of these singing philosophies, these musical religions of the Psalmists' time, there come great thoughts assuring us that, God being King, he ruleth the nations, and conducts an infinite economy of a providential kind.

Following this thought of the kingliness of God, we are not surprised to find that the Psalmists associated with it appropriate emotions on the part of the people. The emotions were not all of one kind. Emotion expresses the character of the singer or the sufferer. We have these words in proof:—"The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice" (xcvii. 1). Is that all? It is a true declaration, and evidently rational, strong in thought as well as musical in expression; but is it all? No. "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble" (xcix. 1)

That is all! Observe the moral completeness of this emotional expression. We understand both the texts if we look within ourselves and trust to the inspiration of our own consciousness. The response will be according to the quality of the character. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice"—in so far as it has been obedient, truthful, responsive, keeping its way in the heavens, for ever singing as it shines concerning the Hand that made it. "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble"—in so far as they have been untrue, unthankful, vicious, selfish, degraded, endeavouring to conceal themselves from God, attempting independence of his providence: for when he cometh he cometh to judge the earth. Stripping all this of the poetry of the immediate occasion, what remains? A solid truth, a grand eternal truth, a sweet satisfaction. This is a pillar whose capital is gold, this a solid column of iron at the head of which is lily-work. The poetry is but the crown of the reason. "He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves" (lxvi. 7). This is comforting song, and this is song rising out of doctrine, as the golden grain rises in answer to the sun out of the solid earth.

Supposing that we really accept the doctrine of the divine kingship and majesty of God, what ought the effect to be upon our own selves? Put the question in this way. We have perused the Psalms, and we observe how they magnify God as King and Lord alone; if we accept this doctrine, how ought we to prove our acceptance of it in our own life? We do not want intellectual assent, but moral consent and affection. One of the first results will be absolute fearlessness: "Perfect love casteth out fear." If we really believe in the kingship of God, we shall be without distress or apprehension:—

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the

earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth ; he breaketh the bow, and putteth the spear in sunder ; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God : I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge " (xlv.).

Find one black line of fear in all that picture ! Find one halting note in all that noble song ! This being our conception, this should also be our experience. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him ; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders," is a lesson which we have seen even in the book of Deuteronomy. This should be our proof that we have accepted the kingship of God. To get at us, the enemy must get through the king first : we dwell in the king's house : we bear the king's bond : our covenant is sealed with the seal of heaven's court.

Absolute fearlessness will be followed by absolute trust : "The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime" (xlii. 8). "This God is our God for ever and ever : he will be our guide even unto death" (xlviii. 14). Can the New Testament go further ?—the arms of God are completely round about us ; he has given his angels charge concerning us. We should call this poetry if it were found in a poetry-book, but it is found in a book which is full of reason, solid thinking, practical experience ; and a book which justifies its poetry by the very severity of its actual life. "Comfort one another with these words." God being king, we will put our trust under the shadow of his throne. He is a king who takes account of his subjects, who numbers his jewels, who makes inquest into the economy of his universe. Let us confidently and lovingly trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. He is worth waiting for. Patience is a proof of our faith. A faith that has no patience is a tree that has no fruit—an organ that has no music—a bird that has no wings ; a complete contradiction in terms.

Then, following fearlessness and trust, comes the assurance of continual support :—"Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains ; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. . . . The

world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (l. 10-12). If every beast of the forest is the Lord's, will he suffer his children to die of hunger? If he owns the cattle upon a thousand hills, shall his children wander desolate and helpless in the wilderness? If the world is God's and the fulness thereof, our bread shall be given us and our water shall not fail. To this high faith we are called, and it is indeed difficult to obey the vocation. Why? Because we are loaded with senses. We have so many points of contact with the outer and lower world. Our feet touch the earth, and our wings are not yet strong enough to beat the air and bear us away to the gate of heaven. Still, the promise of support is there:—"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." If we could live on this divine promise we should be happy all the day long, blow the wind how it might, darken the clouds as they please. "Lord, increase our faith." Are we the sons of a king? Then we must not crouch through the earth, but stand up in dignity. The son owes something to the king: the son represents the sovereign. If the son is lame, halt, blind, poor, narrow of mind, bigoted in thought, selfish in sentiment, he is no king's son, he has no claim to royal descent and association. The son of a king should be magnanimous: he should take large views; he should be benignant even towards human infirmity and sin. See how Christ lived! He went in to eat with publicans and sinners, and turned the feast into a sacrament. He said: "Woman, neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." He called one son—"a son of Abraham." The sons of the king should not be petty critics, small censurers, pedantic judges, forming disheartening estimates of their fellow-men; they should look benignant, there should be a blessing in their smile, there should be deliverance in their grasp, there should be nobleness in their whole port and bearing. We cannot profess to be the followers of a king, and yet degrade that king by servility on our part. We should be majestic in modesty, noble in trust, magnanimous in all things, but especially in forgiveness.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, teach us so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Thou hast made our days fruitful of suggestion from heaven, so that we need not stumble if we will but look at thy providence, and listen to thy law, and make thy book the man of our counsel. Thy word is a lamp unto our feet: if any man stumble in the darkness, the responsibility thou hast placed upon himself. That is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. May we comprehend the light, receive it, reproduce it, enjoy it as heaven's richest gift, and show ourselves in some degree worthy of it, by causing others to come and rejoice in its brightness and warmth. Thou hast set our days in an uncertain place; we cannot number them; we cannot say where they will end; thou hast not revealed the conclusion; thou hast said thou art always coming, and our duty is to wait and watch and serve, that so we may be ready. Thou ridest forth in the chariot of noonday to take thy children home; thou dost set forth on thy journey in the chariot of midnight, and ere the sun be risen thou hast removed many to the mansions that are above. In such an hour as we think not the Son of man cometh. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Thy coming is emancipation, is rest, is heaven. Blessed are they that die in the Lord: for they shall rest, they shall enter into peace; there shall be no more sin, no night, no pain, no death. Thou hast set our days before us, therefore, as so many opportunities, which we are called upon to enjoy, to turn to fruitful account, that we may know thy will more perfectly, and do thy bidding more obediently. We thank thee for life, notwithstanding its pain, its shadows, its disappointments,—yea, notwithstanding it is a daily struggle with death, and in its most beauteous forms it runs along the valley which is full of graves. Yet is life a great privilege, a keen joy, a splendid call to upward behaviour and noble conduct; a challenge to the self to become enlarged, ennobled, and glorified. May we receive life in this spirit. When we are stung by its pains and blighted by its disappointments, may we rest our little griefs upon the infinite sorrow of the Son of God. We find in the Cross thine answer to our sin, thy measure of the value of our life, thy reverence for law. May we look to the Cross, and be lightened; may we stand around the Cross, and never leave it, looking towards it with the eagerness of love, with the expectation of unshaken confidence; and may the answers coming from it from day to day comfort us, bless us, and cause us to magnify thy name in praise. We rejoice to think of the mystery of thy being, the mystery of thy love, the mystery of the Cross, when our heart muses, it burns, and we speak with our tongue, and say, Great is the mystery of godliness—the spirit of eternity—the marvellous meaning of God. Help us to dwell upon great thoughts until all petty ambitions are destroyed; help us to remember the greatness and goodness of God, and to revel in

them with religious delight ; then shall the objector have no power against us, and Satan shall find nothing in our hearts which he can turn to evil account. Fill us with thy Spirit. Grant unto us such knowledge of thy word as shall amount to safety and protection invincible at every point of life ; then shall we grow, and be fruitful, and God shall be pleased, and Christ shall be satisfied. We commend one another to thy gentle love. Let none be omitted from thy blessing ; let the oldest feel that he is not beyond the scope of intercession, and the little one feel that youngest life is precious unto the Father. Send messages of comfort to the sick, the distressed, those who suppose themselves to be abandoned ; and comfort those who are disconsolate. The Lord help us to render acceptable worship before him, that the very oblation we offer may be unto us as an answer to prayer. May the sacrifice be accepted, may the gift be taken up, may all our life be turned into sacramental uses ; and when the eventide comes and the day closes, may we, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, be called to walk with the saints in white. Amen.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD AS REVEALED IN THE PSALMS.

II.

SO far, then, God has been revealed in the Psalms in his kingly or majestic attributes and qualities. We have wondered ; we have been dazzled ; we have been satisfied. The terms which have been applied to God by the Psalmists are worthy of God, as to their grandeur, nobility ; and by so much our imagination is satisfied, our reverence is also satisfied with infinite satisfaction. But are we to pause at the point of majesty ? Is there nothing more ? Is the God of the Psalms but an infinite Light, an infinite King, far away, enthroned, and if looking on at all, looking on with indifference if not contempt ? We cannot be satisfied with God as a King ; and yet we could not be satisfied if God were less than monarch. Now something must be added ; other features must be disclosed if they exist, for we soon tire in looking upon majesty, and mere grandeur, of an abstract kind, that never touches us with a friendly hand, or beams upon us with a complacent smile.

What further, then, have the Psalmists to say of God ? Truly, they magnify his goodness : “ Thy marvellous lovingkindness ” (xvii. 7) is one expression which they use ; “ The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord ” (xxxiii. 5) ; “ O taste and see that the Lord is good ” (xxxiv. 8) ; “ Truly God is good to Israel ”

(lxxiii. 1); "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (xxiii. 6). How the tone changes! We have just heard the great trumpets and the infinite thunderings celebrating the majesty of God: now, with softer tones, with the music of the heart, with the pathos of love, the same great singers sing of the goodness of God. If good, what then? Draw near to him. Have no fear. He does not wish to be worshipped afar off; he desires us to come quite close to him, to whisper to him, as if in confidential interview—to "rest in the Lord;" to recline, as it were, our heads upon his bosom, and there weep out our penitence, there tell the tale of our sin, that we may be interrupted and stopped for ever by the assurances of his mercy. So we have two aspects of God: the great King, and the gentle and good one. If good, continually trust the outcome of things. With intermediate points and developments we have next to nothing to do. Things do look crooked, unmanageable, confused, quite tumultuous indeed, as if disorder had displaced the spirit of harmony, and terror ruled over all. The Christian fixes his attention upon the last outcome. He says: All things work together for good, but during the working together they are not to be analysed or subjected to torture: they are to be simply waited for, and watched, and prayed over, and nothing is to be done in a spirit of disobedience, which would imperil the final grace and harmony. At that point we stand still. We hear the mocker, and acknowledge that if in this life only we have hope, there is point in many of his gibes, and his brutality is not ill-displayed in reference to things which look like cross-providences and miscarriages of divine justice; for when the wicked reign, and the unrighteous are rich, and all things seem to be given over to the cruel and strong man, there is some superficial reason for mocking and taunting those who pray. If good, be like him. The worshipper should always be like his God, and must be in proportion as his worship is sincere, intelligent, complete. We grow like what we love. We become similar to that which we worship. The idolater is like his idol. Find any tribe worshipping an ugly or deformed or ghastly image of deity, and you find the worshippers like that which they adore. But if good, we are to be good—good in every sense: in the moral and spiritual sense. which relates to character, spirituality o

mind, and the general uplifting and coronation of all the faculties, but good also in the other sense, of beneficence,—that is to say; in the sense of kindheartedness, compassion, pity, gentleness, regard for the weal, solicitude about those who have gone astray: this is goodness. We are not to be satisfied with an inward goodness, which is mistakenly so called—a kind of abstract quality; but that which is within is to be translated into beautiful action, beneficent service, the kindness which kills enemies, the love which overcomes opposition.

So far, then, God is good as well as great, and our song shall be of mercy and judgment. In the Psalms God is revealed in many gracious aspects. In particular he is called by two names, which must always endear him to human nature in its best moods and its deepest necessities. “The Lord is my Shepherd” (xxiii. 1). That is one of the names. Then “Like as a father” (ciii. 13). That is the other name. The Psalmists have discovered that not only is God a great King above all gods, but that he is Shepherd and Father. How did such ideas occur to the minds of Israel’s poets? But do we not limit the terms, and really dispossess ourselves of many spiritual advantages, by not fully considering the meaning of such words as “Shepherd,” and “Father”? They are not altogether sentimental terms. Has a shepherd a mere office to fulfil? Does he watch the flock from an hour that is given to an hour that is specified, and is he paid for his services? Is his watchfulness bought? Is his kindness the arithmetical result of a calculation? Is he not stern as well as good,—nay, is he not sometimes severe simply because he is good? And a “father”—is he one who exercises no discipline? Is he made simply to give every child his own way? and does he retain the name of father without fulfilling the functions thereby designated, and discharge the sometimes heavy duties thereby implied? Is a father all smiles? Is there no rod in the house? Is there no tone of rebuke in all the paternal administration? There may be no rod, there may be no judgment, there may be no rebuke, there may be no criticism; but if so the man is no father: he does but sustain certain physical relations to his offspring; their father he is not. So these terms must be taken in their fullest signification. We

must banish that which is merely sentimental, and get at that which is real, substantial, and abiding. Thus God is described in tender and endearing terms. The pastures into which he leads his flock are "green pastures;" the waters by which he conducts his flock are waters of comfort—"still waters." He maketh his flock to lie down at noon, saying, The sun is too hot for the sheep and the lambs; they must be taken where the shadow abides that within its coolness they may rest awhile.

What view did the Psalmists take of God's relation to this world? Is he an absentee owner? Is he never here? Has he but left some writing, signed regally, sealed solemnly, but is he himself never present? What is his relation to this earth?—active, contemplative, disdainful, complacent? What is it according to the conception of the Psalmists? Hear their own words: "God is in the generation of the righteous" (xiv. 5). He knows every link and loop in the living chain; nothing is added but by his permission, nothing is taken away that he does not know of. "Thou wilt save the afflicted people" (xviii. 27). This brings him very near to every one of us: though a king, he is a physician; though mighty, he can walk into the places where sorrow weeps, where weakness throbs out its last little energy, where pain waits dumbly some solution or mitigation of its agony. "O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful" (xxxix. 23). So he is not absent, but present; he is the active force now ruling all things—now drying the tears of grief, now standing by the banner of the true. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry."

So God is not a king only, seated immeasurably beyond the reach of his creatures, enthroned in pomp and state and circumstance, and unmindful of the little, the perishing, the feeble, and those who but dimly represent himself. He identifies himself with them; he looks upon no other object; he listens to the prayer of the earth, the continual intercession of pain and weakness and helplessness. Observe, we are simply dwelling now upon the conception of God formed by the Psalmists; whether we can verify that idea or not, is not the immediate question; first of all, let us get hold of the conception itself, and then

address ourselves as to its value and application to our own conditions.

"The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies" (xli. 1, 2). This reads like the testimony of men who were eye-witnesses. There is nothing abstract about such a deliverance. One would say, judging from the tone, that the men who said all this were only repeating what they themselves had experienced. On such ground men have a right to be heard. We may be impatient in listening to mere opinion, surmise, or declaration; but when men arise to say they will tell us their own religious experience, and certify the same by their personal signature, they have a right to be heard—the right which fact always has in human history. We want to hear what Fact has to say: what has really been done; who testifies. Let every speaker be heard in his own personality and in his own name, and let him sign his testimony in the presence of witnesses. This is precisely what is done throughout the whole Bible. Men do not come with dreams and visions and new fancies, but with autobiography, personal experience, facts which they have seen, felt, known, and handled. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (l. 15); "From heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death" (cii. 19). Again we see how true it is that the Psalmists did not think of God in any merely regal capacity. He was also father, shepherd, mother, nurse, physician, visitor, friend: nearer to men than men were to themselves,—the very mystery of life.

Taking this conception into view, what then? Evidently, first, life is watched. There is nothing too minute for God to see. "His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men" (xi. 4); "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising" (cxxxix. 2). There is not a word in my tongue, there is not a thought in my heart, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. We asked: What is God's relation to this world? This is the tender and solemn reply: a relation of watchfulness, criticism, care, judgment. And then, secondly, because life is watched we are

entitled to infer that life is precious. The Lord would not watch that which is of no value. Even a sparrow falleth not to the ground without God. The reasoning of Christ is an upward and cumulative reasoning : he says, If God so clothe the grass of the field, will he not much more clothe you ? If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without your Father, can a man die without heaven taking notice of the event ? Christ always reasons so. If he can get us to admit that God cares for bird, or flower, or little thing, he carries up the admission to its fullest extent, and binds us to accept a theology of Providence, and to assent to the doctrine that God rules over all, and his tender mercy is over all his works. We cannot tell the preciousness of one life. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Nowhere in the Psalms, or in any other part of the Bible, is human life spoken of in a tone of disparagement, or disdain, or disregard ; the whole tone in relation to man is that the sinner must be saved, though he be but one in number. "If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray ?" Even so the Shepherd of men has come to seek the wanderer, and restore the prodigal to his Father's love. Not only is life watched, and precious because watched, but life is evidently under training. It is not to be judged within the limits of any one day or any one generation. It will grow, it will be refined, little by little ; sometimes almost imperceptibly, so far as the immediate sequence of moments can detect, but given days and months and years, and the progress of the refinement will be very definite. God is *now* creating man, and making man in his own image. We shall dispossess ourselves of great spiritual riches if we limit the creation of man to any one point of time : it is the one concern of time ; it is the one business of the ages. We are now, therefore, being chastened, impoverished, that we may be enriched, untaught that we may be taught, rebuked that we may obey. The whole process of life is probationary, educational, helpful. Judge not yourselves or others by any single day.

Gathering all these passages into one view, how do they impress us? We cannot but be impressed with the noble completeness of the conception. There is nothing wanting. Say we are in a high mood of intellectual enthusiasm, imagination alive, burning, and the whole mental structure is excited to its highest intensity: then the Psalmists meet us and satisfy us by the grandeur of their spiritual words. When they have finished they ask us to find one word indicative of grandeur, majesty, and true pomp, which they have not first discovered and applied. Or, say, we are broken-hearted, blind with tears, sitting in the darkness of despair, and the Psalmists come to us with whisperings that are as balms, with sentiments which are medicinal, with words which soothe without ever becoming burdensome, with figures which quicken our fancy, and make it a broad open gate through which judgment comes to reap a harvest of rational and glorious consolation. Where can we go for tender terms if not to a Psalm like the 103rd, where God does everything for man that man can need in his lowest and weakest estate, restoring, comforting, forgiving, chastening, soothing, removing iniquities away as far as the east is from the west? Where else is God represented as numbering our days, and remembering what we are, and pitying us after great sins? Where but in the 107th Psalm does God come back after every apostasy with a new redemption, giving us hope in the night-time, and an opportunity even in the densest darkness to return and be restored? Now this noble completeness of the conception begins an argument: how did such men at such a time acquire such a conception of God? It is impossible to believe that the singers were not inspired. This is God's revelation of himself. There is no other revelation like it in all the sacred books of the world. In other sacred books we can find pomp of expression, and some reference to possible pity—but the reference is very small and indistinct; nowhere do we find this conception on the same lines, of the same magnitude, the same clearness, of the same reverent audacity. What other religion but the religion of the Bible could describe its God as Shepherd, Father, Healer, Nurse? It is, therefore, simply impossible to some to believe that the Psalmists conceived their God, having regard to the completeness of the

conception, its boldness and fulness and satisfactoriness. Thus the Bible must become its own witness evermore. If any man can improve this conception of God, let him do so. He has yet to do it. Even Christ and the Apostles when they come will work on the same lines, recognise the same God, and but add some point of illumination ; they will never utter a word sweeter than "Shepherd," tenderer than "Father," nor can they make a word fuller in sacred meaning than "lovingkindness" or "tender mercy."

Nor are we less impressed with the adaptation of this conception to universal conditions. This God is not confined to the Psalms, nor is the Bible God confined to Hebrew or other eastern lands. How did the people of one nation conceive a God for all nations? All the nations accept these designations and attributes and relations, and never attempt to change one of them. The Psalms deal with universal conditions when they deal with the poor, the oppressed, the weary, the troubled, the persecuted. This universality of the conception is a conclusive argument in favour of its divine origin. Not a word of limitation can be found here ; there is no hint that other nations must make gods for themselves if they want them ; there is no suggestion that this is the God of the Jew or the Hebrew, or the God of Israel only : he is universal as the sun, he is as impartial as the rain ; the figures by which he is represented to the race are all figures which every child can see and every man can partially understand. He is the God of the whole earth, the God reigning over all people, the God saving all nations. It is something to have such a conception, and something to be able to say that after all literature, history, education, experience, we can add nothing to it : the pillar bears a capital which none can heighten and none can glorify. When we are in our noblest moods of mind we take most easily to the biblical expression of our thought ; when we are in greatest need of succour, no words can so precisely express our pain and want as words which are found in the sacred volume. For these reasons, in addition to many others, we believe the Psalms to have been first sung in heaven, and the whole Bible to be not the word or work of man, but the revelation and writing and testimony of the living God.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, one look from thine eye will be as morning to us and as the beginning of heaven. Thou wilt not withhold that look of kindness from us, seeing we are before thee in the name of Jesus Christ thy Son, and that for his sake alone we beg the giving of every favour. Our hope is in the Cross. We dare not pray in our own name, or ply thee with arguments of our own making, for they would but aggravate the sin we cannot obliterate; but we will point to the Cross, we will stand before thy Son our Saviour, we will interpret the meaning of his flowing blood, and we know that from him we shall receive all things good for us in this life and in all the worlds to come. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. We live in him our new life; we breathe eternally because of his eternity. We bless thee for thine house: it is a sure resting-place, a window from which we can see heaven, a height standing on which we can overhear sweet music from other worlds. Meet us at the altar, and let the rising of our song unto thee be a challenge to which thou wilt reply with further revelation of love. Thou hast been mindful of us with infinite tenderness. We have heard of thine anger, but whilst we have been listening to the marvellous revelation of thy wrath, we have also heard that it is but for a moment. We have heard of thy mercy, whilst we have been amazed at thy tenderness: behold, all the houses of history have said, His mercy endureth for ever. Thus we are made glad; yea, we are made astonished with an infinite astonishment, because our God is pitiful, his eyes are full of tears, his heart melts with tenderness; he lifts the thunder to let it drop again, lest the poor victim, the criminal before him, should be crushed never to rise again. Thy way is full of wonder. Nothing occurs as we expected it to happen. We look in this direction for light, and behold it is flaming behind us, coming from a quarter unexpected and uncalculated by our perverted minds. We say, The Lord will do this; and behold whilst we are shaping out a way for thee thou art walking upon the wings of the wind, and the clouds are the dust of thy feet; thy way is in the whirlwind, and thy place of rest is in the tabernacles of thunder. Who can understand thy way? Who can comprehend thy meaning? Who shall say, This is the Lord, and this is not? Thy chariots are twenty thousand, and all calculation is baffled by the movements of God. We will stand still; we will close our lips in reverent silence; we will say in our heart, whispering the sweet Gospel to ourselves, lest we should lose its music by loud utterance, The Lord will come; yea, he will come quickly, and thousands of his angels will come with him; then the crooked shall be made straight, and the high places shall be made low, and that which is lacking shall be numbered. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. We bless thee for thy Book—a Book without beginning and without end; high as the firmament, inaccessible yet radiant as the

morning horizon. Help us to read it with clear eyes, to receive it into honest hearts, and to embody it in obedient lives. A wondrous Book having in it all light, all truth, all wisdom; a marvellous Book, a golden gate falling back upon all heaven, admitting us into the city, and giving us to know what they are doing there who have gone before and have been robed in the white linen of the saints. We pray for one another. We are always within a touch of death. There is but a step between us and the end, wherever we may be on the journey. We give thee thanks for all safe deliverance and all protection, and for all the success with which thou hast crowned our labours. Thou hast been with us in our going out and in our coming in again, and there has not been a day which has not been brightened by thy presence, nor a night that has not been sealed with the blessing of thy sleep. We, therefore, praise thee, and hail one another in the name of the Lord, and say, It is well with those with whom the Lord is well pleased. Thou hast delivered us from terrors by night and by day, from perils on the land, and from perils on the sea, and we know not from what perils until we see others involved in their tremendous dangers. The Lord bless the house, the family gathering-place and sleeping-place, the sweet home where the fire is the fireside of hospitality, security, affection; the Lord grant that the house may become a home, and the home a church, and the church be just outside heaven's own gate. As for those who are troubled and perplexed, dashed back in life when they meant to go forward, give such the true view of life: show them the falseness of all earthly calculations; show them that not a fountain plays on all the earth whose waters will not be drained off; and show them also that the living fountain is in the heavens, and say unto them: Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Sanctify our afflictions, sanctify our disappointments, turn to uses of spiritual health all the things which we supposed to be against us. If any man is looking round, and seeing the enemy gathering around him a thousand strong, say unto him: When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Thus may we live and move and have our being in God, and rest in the nest of the divine love, and abide constantly in the sanctuary of the divine protection. Amen.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AS REVEALED IN THE PSALMS.*

WE have inquired what relation the God of the Psalms is pleased to sustain towards the affairs of men. We have endeavoured to answer the question—Was it contemplative, indifferent, disdainful? Or active, complacent, redemptive? We have now to enlarge the inquiry, and ask, What was the conception of divine providence held by the Psalmists, and how did it sustain, inspire, and comfort them in their manifold and anxious

* See also in relation to the doctrine of Providence, *ante*, p 205.

experience ? The providence which is revealed in the Psalms is a providence marked by fulness of mystery. The cloud was as dark as midnight. We read, "Thy judgments are far above out of sight" (x. 5). The men were standing, as it were, looking upward strainingly, as if by stretching their stature they could reach unto God, as if by fixing their eyes attentively upon heaven they might at least discover the footholds of the throne. But nothing came of all the straining, except the assurance that God's judgments were out of sight, far beyond the line accessible to human vision. Then again we read, "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (xcvii. 2). That is discouraging. How does that experience correspond with our own ? It so far corresponds that we would not change the utterance in a solitary tone. Even now when we want to describe our view of God's rule of this world, we cannot find truer or nobler terms than these, "Clouds and darkness are round about him." Language is thousands of years older now than it was at the time in which the psalms were sung. Learning has grown upon every hand ; the power of expression has been carried to its very highest point ; and now even in its maturity and perfection language is only too thankful to borrow the sublime strains of the Hebrew song, and to say concerning God, "Clouds and darkness are round about him." All this is natural. The other view would have been altogether untenable. A God that could be comprehended would not have satisfied every faculty of the mind. Nay, a God who could have been measured, comprehended, and understood, would have gone down from that point, and have gradually sunk into moral contempt. His way would be patent ; all his reasons would be upon the surface ; the lightest-minded person could have said, We know what he will do to-morrow, and we read his plan down to the very last line and tittle ; so now we can take our own course, and fit in our ways where we please, and depart from the line providential where we like. But God cannot be anticipated. We know not what he will do on the morrow. That mysterious point of time is under the divine control ; within the scope of that to-morrow God has dug so many graves, turned back so many ambitions, inflicted so many disappointments, and sent out so many consolations, and adjusted so many controversies, and has not communicated the secret to any finite

intelligence. Here, then, comes up all that is best in worship. Here reverence takes its stand, and, uncovered, awaits before God to know what is the next thing to be done, and asks for power to accomplish it. This is not only natural, but it is widely and profoundly educational. We are trained by a right use of our ignorance, and a right realisation of the boundaries which enclose us. At first we suppose there are no stakes or cords but that our dwelling-place is boundless; then we begin to find that we are shut in, that beyond a certain point we cannot advance a solitary step, that our boasted liberty is only a liberty to obey. That is the beginning of the soul's deepest education. The soul comes back from its survey, which it supposed to be boundless, and says in effect, Seeing that I am not gifted with infinite and uncontrolled liberty, amounting to irresponsibility, let me quietly consider what is my position, what am I, what forces have I at my disposal, what is my limit, and in how far, and according to what quality have I to answer at the last for the little day I spend under the sun. Thus, too, patience is trained. Nothing refines the soul so much as the exercise of willing, uncomplaining, rejoicing patience—to be prepared that to-morrow should be as monotonous as to-day, and to know that for the next year there will be no change in our solitariness and weakness, but that we shall still be living under the same grey sky, and be blown upon by the same cold cruel wind; and yet to say, Seeing this is God's doing, it is best; he will turn this pain to sacramental uses; we will make this weariness an opportunity for deepening our spiritual knowledge, and encouraging and sustaining our spiritual vitality. Thus, too, faith grows: not to know God, and yet to believe God; to have no information extending beyond the immediate moment, and yet to be sure that all will be right at the last, is to grow in faith, to be solid at the centre, to be sound at the core. The larger view is always the right one. Within given limits, we think we are talking according to the suggestion of facts, whilst all the time we are misinterpreting the very facts which we suppose ourselves to know. Once let that assurance take possession of the heart, and at once the whole life becomes chastened, and the whole spirit puts on the beauty of modesty. We see nothing as it really is. Again and again we have had occasion to say, Seeing may be

believing, but what is seeing? We play fast and loose with the terms on which we build great theories. We know as little about seeing as we know about believing. No man *sees*. He can but discover appearances, and he looks upon them even imperfectly, and the things which he dignifies by the name of facts will play him false to-morrow—vanish as fictions; the only right spirit, therefore, in relation to divine providence is to acknowledge the mystery, to bow before it, to wait patiently for God. What does the child say about the snow? The child thinks that the snow steals a march upon the sun, and that if the sun would but shine in all his heat there would be no snow. The child is right within given limits, and yet if the sun were diminished in heat we should have no Alpine snow, no great glacier-ribs of ice that seem to make the very earth cold at the heart. These great ice-formations are creations of the sun: diminish his heat, and you destroy these fields of ice. The sun's heat is the mystery of all things. Diminish it, and you shut out the distillery of creation, and that which you never imagined possible will prove itself to be the unwelcome and ghastly fact.

But not only was providence covered with what may be termed intellectual mystery, puzzling and bewildering the understanding and the imagination,—providence as known by the Psalmists was full of moral perplexity. That was the great difficulty. Men can put up with intellectual riddles, but when they fancy they see conscience and right outraged they almost cease to pray.

"My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish" (lxxiii. 2-7).

So long as the mystery was intellectual, it was rather matter of entertainment than otherwise: for who does not like some kind of metaphysical puzzle that he can trifle with, and speculate upon, and put in various lights, so as to enchain the attention and entrance the imagination of other men? But the intellectual has become moral: now it seems as if vice were patronised of heaven,

and virtue discouraged, as though wickedness were the one way to the divine complacency. What wonder if Asaph's feet were almost gone? Asaph says: I saw it; this is not a matter I have heard about, nor especially is it a matter concerning which there are conflicting rumours; I have seen the eyes of the wicked, and they stand out with fatness; I have gone over their estates, and they are marked by redundant luxuries; this is patent; I would not have thrown away my harp if I had only heard by way of rumour that some wicked man was rich and well, but I have seen it, and now my harp-strings have lost their tension, and these poor fingers that used to play with such skill and *verve* fall palsied by my side. That is so. Here again, within given limits, the case is precisely as Asaph saw it and as Asaph wrote it. But beware! what have you seen? Tell me under what circumstances this tragedy, or that, occurred. You reply: The sun was immediately overhead when the tragedy happened. I say—No; the sun is never overhead in England. But I saw it. Never! Do you mean to tell me that the sun is not immediately overhead at a certain moment of the day? I do; the sun cannot be overhead directly in England, or anywhere, but at one line, and at two assignable points measured from that line. Then have I to disbelieve my own eyes? Yes—instantly! Would God you were blind on some occasions, for then would you see! Let me hold imaginatively before you a beam of light. Do you see it? Yes. I can deliver that beam to you in two parcels: I can sift or filter it so as to send the light without the heat, and in a more imperfect manner, but a manner which may presently be matured; I can send the heat, as it were, by another parcels' delivery. Have you seen it done? You have never seen it done, but that does not prove that it is not done. Again and again we have seen that it is impossible for all the boiling water in creation to clean a vessel. You have scalded the vessel, but you have not cleaned it; you have made it clean enough for practical purposes, but no chemist could use it. It is one thing to be mechanically clean, and another to be chemically pure. In science we call these "fine distinctions," but when the great moralists and apostles stand up and say, You can wash the hands but you cannot wash the heart: "Ye must be born again," we call it "fanaticism" or "rhapsody." We must not, therefore, judge too much by appear-

ances. Asaph did not occupy the right point of view. He himself says so : for when he went into the sanctuary of God, he understood the end of the wicked ; then he took back his harp, and never played it as he did the moment after he saw the real situation of the ungodly. But we might take this in another point of view. Why not say when the wicked are in great prosperity, Surely their wickedness is not so great as I imagined it to be. Or : Surely my goodness is not so certain as I once thought it was. Who betakes himself to that line of searching criticism ? Who does not find it easier and more convenient to say that he is right, and that if any one prospers who is not of his opinions or policy of conduct, that prosperous man is an alien and an infidel ?

Out of this two-fold mysteriousness of providence there would almost necessarily come a provocation of the worst spirit of criticism. As a matter of fact this provocation did take place in the Psalmists ; so one of them exclaims, " Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ? " (lxxxix. 47.) Think of it ! That a man who cannot tell what will be on the morrow should thus criticise and challenge the divine scheme ! How difficult to suppress oneself, and to divest oneself of unavowed but not wholly unconscious infallibility ! Every man is a pope. Every man believes himself practically to be infallible. It may be an easy protestantism that fulminates against a distant dignity but forgets that the human heart is papal, and that to be a man is to be a pope. Another Psalmist says, " Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain " (lxxiii. 13). Think of it ! A man so reading the facts of creation and human history as to suppose that his personal hand-washing is of the slightest consequence in the universe ! " I have become Pharisee for nothing ; I might have been eating and drinking with the publicans to-night to my heart's content ; and, lo, I have got nothing in exchange for the soap and the nitre I have expended in cleansing my hands ! " A man who can so talk about his hands has never cleansed them ; he has performed a mechanical ablution, but the true catharism he has never undergone.

Now the tone changes, and providence is represented in the next place as sovereign and final. Hear the truth, " He putteth

down one, and setteth up another" (lxxv. 7); "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (lxxvi. 10); "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people" (cxiii. 7, 8). This is the right tone: God handling the universe with imperial power; God making disposition of angels and men as it pleaseth him; God fixing the bounds of our habitation, and drawing the line within which the foam of our fury dies in pallid weakness. God is thus put in his right position as King. "The Lord reigneth." This quiets us also in the presence of elevations which might distress us. Why should any man be superior to me? Why should not I stand first in the ranks, and be admitted first to see the king? and why should not others hear of the king through me? Why should I be poor and my rival rich? We started together; nay, we were children of the same mother, and behold he is wealthy and famous, and looked up to and will be renowned for many a day, and I have no lot or portion or inheritance in the land. Thus speaks the spirit of fretfulness, discontent, and peevishness. But let a man say in his soul, "God putteth down one, and setteth up another; God raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and setteth among princes, even amongst the princes of his people, whom he will; to live is honour enough for me, to be permitted to pray is next to being permitted to sing with the angels; even I, poor, disdained, have some lot in this great estate." "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." We cannot amend the sentences concerning Providence which are found in the Psalms. To-day men live by their proclamation. To-day singers make their fortunes by singing the ideas of Hebrew poetry. The words of the Psalmists in describing God's ways are words which breathe through all the ages, and cannot be displaced by the invention of man. So, amid all difficulties, contradictions; amid all mysteries, intellectual, spiritual, moral, we will pray for patience, love, faith; we will ask that we may be enabled to wait until the time of solution; we will trust in the living God, which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves and the tumult of the people. This is Christian obedience. Anything other than this is impertinence,—yea, is blasphemy.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we come on the Sabbath day that we may be healed. It is the healing day. It is made sacred to healing. We come on no other day: for this is the day the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Redeem us from our iniquities, heal our diseases, and let our backsliding be for ever forgotten. We would that this day might be memorable because of the healing we receive from heaven. Send none unhealed away; we rejoice in thy name, O living Christ, as the healer of men. Thou art the great Physician; thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust; there is nothing in us that thou didst not thyself set in its place and in its order: grant unto us, then, thy healing grace, O thou loving Saviour of the world. We cannot heal ourselves, though we are self-destroyed: it is easy to work out destruction, but in the Lord alone is salvation. When there was no eye to pity, when there was no arm to save, thine own eye pitied, and thine own arm brought salvation. This is the day on which we hear these things,—the day of heaven's own light and heaven's own music; we will answer the dawn, and spring in glad response to the music, and will be found in the house of the Lord with a new song upon our lips. Great is thy goodness, tender is thy mercy, and as for thy lovingkindness we know not how to express it: it is higher than heaven, wider than all space. We have come to hear the living Word, which is as the bread of life and the water sent down from heaven for the satisfaction of men's burning thirst. Give us the hearing ear, the understanding heart, and the obedient will; then shall thy word run, have free course, and be magnified, and all people shall rejoice as those who have been long in darkness, but have now seen the rising of a great light. All our necessities are known to thee: some are too deep for words; others may not be expressed, for we could not ourselves bear the utterance of them; but all we need thou knowest, for thou dost not only hear our speech, thou readest the motions of our heart: they are toward thyself, they beat heavenward, they are motions of aspiration, and they are significant of trust and love and hope; answer them as thou alone canst answer with all the benevolence and all the tenderness of the Cross. Our life is made up of days that are few and evil; our days are swifter than a post, our life is swifter than a weaver's shuttle, flying to and fro, working out its web of thought and purpose and meaning. We are hardly young until, behold, age is advancing upon us; whilst talking of to-day, to-morrow is giving promise of its coming. We bless thee therefore

for all that fills up the void, and makes the little great, and turns the insignificant into sublimity. This is done by thy gospel; this is the miracle of the Christian's faith. May we find that the water of this life is turned into the wine of the next, that all common things are now invested with uncommon and celestial meaning. Come into our hearts as we are able to receive thee. Plead not against us with thy great power; let our weakness be an attraction to thee; let our very poverty draw thee closely to our souls: then shall we know thee as the good Lord, and the Giver of Good, the Father of Lights, and the Fountain of Blessings. Regard with special love those who are in great sorrow, loss, pain, extremity, and with still added tenderness regard those who are leaving the world—some sorrowfully, some joyfully, some eagerly, because they would be away joining the sons of light and the children of song in the land that is all summer. The Lord grant unto all who wait upon the sick and the weary, patience, a hopeful spirit, a tender heart, facility in loving invention, that they may double their attention by the fertility of their care and industry. The Lord bless the nations of the earth: they are all thine, all equally thine; and if we are still narrow enough to pray for one land we would pray for our own: but thou hast taught us that the earth is thine, that all the nations belong to one another because they belong to Christ. Enable us, therefore, to rest in providence, to trust in the great sovereignty of God, in the lofty and eternal rule of Christ; then we shall be at rest, though the mountains tremble and the seas would empty themselves out of their channels because of their tumult. Enable us to stand fast in the eternal truth that the Lord reigneth. And as for those who are playing with empires and nations, and turning greatest human questions their own way, this or that: the Lord grant unto us all the wisdom of patience, the confidence of great principles, assured that, let man do what he may, or leave undone what he will, the universe is under God's keeping, and will be shaped according to God's thought. The Lord hear us when we pray. May our prayers grow upon us until they become as replies; may our hearts feel their hunger, and utter it, until the very utterance of their desire shall itself become a satisfaction. Wash us in the precious blood shed before the foundation of the world—the mysterious blood, the everlasting sacrifice, the all-blessing and all-cleansing blood of Christ; then shall we be accepted in the Beloved, here we shall be free men, and presently we shall be as the angels of God. Amen.

THE DESTINY OF THE WICKED AS REVEALED IN THE PSALMS.

WE do not expect to hear much about the wicked in the book of music. The subject would seem to be out of place amid the utterance of praise and thanksgiving and adoration. We may be the more affected in consequence of the very surprise which is excited by the presence of so repelling a subject under circumstances otherwise so fascinating and

attractive. We are taught by contrasts. God uses the element of surprise in our education. He does not allow us to see all the line at once, but meets us at corners, with things we never dreamed of; he shows us pictures in the darkness; he startles us by lightning at midnight: in many ways he uses what may be called the element of surprise or amazement for the purpose of educating us in the deepest spiritual truths. Surely this is the case in an instance like the present. The Book of Psalms will be all music and dancing and mirthfulness, delight, heavenliness; there will be nothing about hell in a book consecrated to harmony. So we should say, and therefore our wonder will be the keener if even in this psalm-book we come upon expressions appalling as lightning and terrible as uncalculated and unexpected thunder.

It is beautiful to observe how gradually, so to say, the revelation of the destiny of the wicked is made in the Book of Psalms. We come upon the fact very early in the Psalter that there are ungodly persons. Even in the very first psalm the destiny of the wicked is indicated:—"The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" (i. 4). This is comparatively nothing. The wicked man might bear this. Still, we begin to see how the line is pointing. This is only contempt; it is not perdition. The wicked man is willing to be for the moment as chaff which the wind driveth away: there is no destruction in that driving; there may be upset and tumult and somewhat of perplexity and difficulty in being thus treated and opposed, but there is no hell in this opposition of the wind. It is something to mark the very first point. When we meet contempt in the Bible we meet it under circumstances which invest it with tremendous significance. The Bible is not a book which is contemptuous towards man without some reason which will be vindicated. There is no scorn in the divine revelation merely for scorn's own sake. God does not judge merely because he would vary the monotony of his eternity by treating with contempt the creatures of his own hand. When he looks contemptuous he means judgment—hell! At first, therefore, the wicked meet with no complacence in the Holy Scriptures which are written in the language of music. The moment the wicked man appears even in the Psalms he is driven

away like chaff. Note the time and note the beginning of the divine displeasure.

Let us advance a step :—"Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone ; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly" (iii. 7). So even thus early the Psalmists do not intend to give much hospitality to the wicked ; even in the singing-house the wicked man shall not sit down at ease, as if he had a right to be where the heavenly music is. Now compare the figures : "the chaff which the wind driveth away ;" and then a cheek bone which is smitten and teeth which are broken. This is humiliation. There is no grandeur in the punishment. There is nothing heroic in such endurance as this. It is but a higher kind of contempt, a more active scorn. But notice that it is indeed the scorn of God. Are they not worthy of being smitten elsewhere than on the cheek bone, or to have aught broken but their sharp teeth ? The punishment is not yet internal or spiritual. Still, the figures seem to belong to one another. Not to be regarded with dignified indignation, but to be treated with contempt, to be smitten upon the cheek bone and to have the teeth broken, is to be subjected to humiliation of the deepest kind.

Now advance one step further :—"Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest" (xi. 6). Thus the figure changes violently. But still there is no peace to the wicked. He does not grow upon our acquaintance. He has not discovered to us unsuspected beauties or disclosed unimagined fascinations. The contempt has now grown into anger, and the anger into judgment, and the judgment into perdition. God cannot rest in heaven whilst there is one wicked thing in all the universe. Yet we find these statements in the Book of Psalms—in the tune book, in the book of harps and psalteries and instruments of ten strings. Is there not even here something significant ? Shall not the wrath of man be made to praise God ? Shall there not be strange voices introduced into the great choir at last, that shall even by their harshness and their hoarseness contribute somewhat to the praise of a government that never paltered with the wicked and that never accommodated itself to unrighteousness ? Now we have come to the element of fire, and still it burns, as thus :—"Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven

in the time of thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (xxi. 9). Why trifle with such words? why endeavour by some grammatical jugglery to wriggle out of them as though they meant something comparatively trivial? Language cannot be clearer, words cannot be stronger; God would be trifling with men if he said all this about burning, swallowing up, and destruction, and simply meant something superficial, evanescent, and inconsiderable. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "Our God is a consuming fire." Why not be afraid of him in his relations to sin, and exclaim penitently and rationally, It is right that God should be thus angry with the wicked every day, for if he were otherwise virtue would have no security and heaven would be an impossibility? Why try to reduce the figure to meaninglessness? The figure itself is less than the language which it signifies when it is applied for divine purposes in relation to eternal facts. We show but the foolish side of our nature when we ask whether literal fire can be meant, and a local hell can be intended by the expressions which are used concerning it. We are not in a right mood of mind when we ask such foolish questions; the thing to be asked is this: What is God's relation to sin? and the answer is, It is a relation of judgment, hatred; it is the abominable thing which God hateth, and no literal fire can be so hot and so destructive as the disapprobation of God.

We now come to another style of treatment, but still pointing to the same solemn issue. Thus:—"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked" (xxxii. 10). Note the environment: sorrows of many kinds. God is not limited to one class of sorrow or penalty. The wicked man shall be mocked, tripped up, disappointed; he shall seize an egg, and find it a scorpion; he shall set his teeth in bread, and have those teeth broken by a stone. "Many sorrows,"—many kinds of sorrows; sorrows of every quality, and every hue, and every range, and every name; nay, more, new sorrows, unexpected penalties, inflictions never dreamed of by the imagination of men. God has set the universe against the wicked man: the stars will not light him home, the summer will grow only poison for his hunger; he has not a friend in all the starry firmament: to not one of these bright, all-but-living planets can he look,

saying, That is mine : see how it smiles upon me, and would talk to me if it could : no ; heaven's great firmament of stars is as an embattled army against all wicked men. Whatever the wicked man enjoys he steals. He is a felon in his heart. If successful, he is a successful knave. Creation disowns him ; heaven will not acknowledge his name. The prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord, and are sent back in showers of burning sparks.

The wicked man has no easy time of it in the Book of Psalms. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. . . . Evil shall slay the wicked" (xxxiv. 16, 21). The wickedness of the wicked man is the sword by which he kills himself : his very success is his failure ; his very fattening is for the slaughter. "The face of the Lord"—where is it ? what is it ? Is it symbolised by the heavens and the earth, by all space and all magnitude ? Can it burn ? Can it scorch men who look upon it ? Is it a face all eyes ? Is it a face red with anger ? Is it a face terrible with ghostliness ? Is it a spectral power that makes the darkness light, and then shuts it up again as with a seal that cannot be broken ? This is how the wicked man lives according to the revelation of the Book of Psalms. The "face of the Lord" is against him : so is the face of beauty, the face of light, the face of childhood ; no little child will caress the wicked man, or in the midst of a caress will recoil from him as if a serpent had been touched. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." He cannot sit down but on a stolen seat ; he dare not look up, for heaven's righteousness is against him. These declarations are not made in a book of judgments, in a collection of moral sentences pronounced upon moral crime ; they are brought into the great harmonies and musical expressions of the universe ; they are there used up, as it were, as fuel by which is lighted the very altar of God.

Even in the Psalms we alight upon texts which come down upon us like showers in a tempest :—"The wicked shall perish" (xxxvii. 20) ; "The transgressors shall be destroyed together" (xxxvii. 38) ; "Thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth" (xxxix. 11).

Dare the wicked man read the Psalms? Has he any one of the hundred and fifty which he can call his own, and which he can read in the morning light before going out to renew his iniquity? Is there not one line left for the poor wretch? Has he not one string in all the infinite harp? Can he not quote one verse, saying, This encourages me to do the best I can for myself, to perpetrate mischief, to outwit my fellow-creatures, to keep false weights and measures; this will enable me to give licence to every desire of my heart? In all the Book of Psalms not one little line can be claimed by the bad man. Here is a fate: who dare encounter it? "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them" (lxxv. 8). Who is equal to that occasion? In whose hand is there a cup? In the Lord's hand. Then it may be large and heavy. What is the colour of the wine? It is the colour of fire, for it is "red." What is in the cup? A "mixture." Who can explain that word? Who knows what is brought together in that vessel—what various elements, what strange constituents, what an unimaginable compound? Who shall take of the dregs thereof? All the wicked of the earth shall live upon them, shall drink them; their throats will be suffocated; their whole nature will burn as with the fire of poison. Why not? they set themselves against the Lord, and against his Anointed: let the battle be fair, let the contest be fought out to its legitimate and tremendous end, and let him who is right win at last. We cannot live a lifetime of opposition to God, and then be friends with him at the very last as if nothing had occurred. They who appeal to Cæsar must to Cæsar go: they who defy God must enter the lists solitarily with him, and if they can fight Omnipotence, let them do so.

But the wicked sometimes prosper:—"Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish;" they seem to have all the earth as their pasture:—"Thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (lxxiii. 18, 19); and again:—"When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the **workers** of

iniquity do flourish ; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever" (xcii. 7). They dance around their own graves ; they jibe across the poison they are about to drink. Their flourishing is but superficial and evanescent ; there is no stay in it, or lasting quality : there is no blessing in their lot. Who then will choose the position of the wicked, and pursue the career of those whose hearts are at enmity with God ? Note, they will have apparent success ; they will be released from much discipline, they will escape into what for the moment may appear to be liberty ; they can curse, and fume, and blaspheme, and cheat, and forge, and lie, and take short cuts to what they call their fortune : all this they can do, but the shorter the cut the nearer the hell.

Truly the Psalms are not all music ; there is a sound of judgment in all this holy praise :—"A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about" (xcvii. 3) ; "They . . . were brought low for their iniquity" (cvi. 43) ; "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted" (cvii. 17) ; "He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked" (cxxix. 4) ; "Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God" (cxxxix. 19) ; "He casteth the wicked down to the ground" (cxlvii. 6). Not in some one particular psalm are the wicked denounced, as if by a kind of accident, or as if to express a momentary mood of the mind, or as if to exhaust the vengeance of one particular poet : but from the first psalm right away on to the very end, God's policy, so to say, against the wicked is one and the same—a policy of hatred, detestation, judgment, and everlasting destruction. There is not one word of relief ; there is nothing to trust to ; there is not one friend to flee to : and we acknowledge this to be right. Is it not our own course, in so far as we ourselves are really in earnest about anything that is vital or delightful or true ? There is nothing arbitrary in the treatment of the wicked as described in the Book of Psalms. This is what society itself is doing on its own plane and according to its own degree and quality. Take an occasion devoted to solemn and noble music, and there is, according to our imagined state of affairs, one man in the assembly who persists in throwing discord into that music, in uttering hoarse, harsh sounds, in marring the tender beauty of the whole occasion,—what is done

with that man by the very society that will not call itself religious? Is that man allowed to remain and to continue his persistent disturbance? Does not the heart of the assembly rise and say, "Eject him—cast him out"? Let any man reply who knows human nature. What is that in its own degree but exactly the doctrine of the Bible in relation to wickedness? Many shall come and say, "Lord, Lord, open unto us; thou hast taught us in our streets, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, we have done some wonderful works in thy name,—Lord, Lord, open unto us." But he will answer them and say, "I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." Iniquity in heaven would be heaven without heavenliness. It cannot be. It is a disorder against which the spirit of righteousness utters its indignant and destructive judgment. Is it not the same in other conditions and in other places? An assembly is called for the purpose of solemnly considering some great question, and one man persists in turning aside the spirit of order; he is determined upon unruliness and ill-nature, and he is evidently not in harmony or accord with the purpose of the gathering; and, observe, that assembly is not a church: it may be a meeting of politicians who know nothing about heaven or hell in their then capacity: what do they do? They use the same language which has already been employed—"Eject him—cast him out, for he is not of the spirit and order of this assembly." So, then, if we consider the whole matter from end to end, we shall find that even in society there is precisely the same indignation against that which is wicked in relation to itself which we find in the Bible as in relation to the living God. We ask questions about the destiny of the wicked: why turn that destiny into a speculative inquiry? Take what view we may of the language of Scripture (and there we must not be uncharitable) there remains the awful fact, that to be wicked is to be without peace; to be wicked is to be for ever at enmity with God; that to be at enmity with God is to provoke the judgment of the Most High; that to live under the judgment of God is hell beyond all that human imagination can conceive. We must not ask too many questions about these unrevealed mysteries, but, judging by the policy of society, by the instincts of the heart when it is in its best moods, we can

but say that it is right that any spirit that is opposed to the spirit of purity, order, peace, righteousness, music, must be destroyed if the universe is ever to be at rest.

The words quoted from the Psalms indicate—indistinctly enough, as all words must do—the state of the world when Christ came into it. In the Psalms there is not one word said of the sinner that is not full of judgment. “Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth” we find at the close of one of the noblest compositions in the whole Psalter, namely, the 104th Psalm—a great psalm of nature, a marvellous contemplation of all the glories and beauties of nature; and the Psalmist at last says, “Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more,” as if to say, Only let this be accomplished, and the universe will be complete in its music and beauty. How does Christ speak when he comes into a world so described? He calls to repentance. He says, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us: herein is love: last of all God sent his Son. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;” “He that believeth shall be saved.” We cannot understand that message until we are deeply affected with the thoughts which are written in the Book of Psalms and in other portions of Holy Scripture. The mountain was very great, but Jesus Christ said he would level it with the earth; the darkness was a darkness terrible, a seven-fold midnight, but he said he would set a star in the midst of it that would dissolve the gloom, and a sun that should drive every shadow away. He said, The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint: from the crown of the head to the sole of the feet there is no health, but I will restore soundness and health to the soul of man. He came to do no little work. He did not enter into a small battlefield where the foes were few and feeble; he came to wrestle with the very spirit of evil, to cast out Satan, to bruise the serpent's head. O thou blessed mighty Son of God, go on to conquer—“win and conquer, never cease!” He has promised not to surrender the contest. It is in his hands. He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. We believe this word, for we call it the Word of God.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, help us to search the Scriptures, for in them we know we have eternal life, and they are charged in every line with the meaning of the incarnation of thy Son ; they testify of Christ ; they tell of his coming ; they reveal his person and his character ; they contain the sweet words of his ministry ; they speak of all his pain and agony, and of his death and resurrection, of his ascension and priesthood. May we therefore understand the Scriptures and find comfort in them every day. We bless thee for a book that is now written in our mother tongue which explains to us the way of eternal life. This is the Book of God ; this is the voice of Heaven ; we cannot mistake it ; we need not misunderstand it ; save us evermore from misapplying it. Thy Word is full of life ; thy Word is light ; thy Word is music. We mourn that we have not acquainted ourselves more deeply with thy Word, for then should we have had an answer to every temptation, a defence against every assault, and a sanctuary inviolable in the time of winter and tempest. May we now begin to read thy Word with the spirit and with the understanding, and may we open our hearts to receive it with all simplicity and gratitude. Behold, thou dost make us men in Christ Jesus as we acquaint ourselves with thy testimony. There is no book like the Book of God : it is the bread sent down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall never hunger. Thy Book is as a fountain of water in the wilderness ; we drink thereof, lift up our heads, and are glad. We pray that the inspiring Spirit may inspire the readers of thy Book, so that thy Word may be read in the right temper and in the right tone, and may be accepted with all humility, and that the spirit of the readers may be a spirit of teachableness. Walk with us, thou Son of God, and beginning at Moses and all the prophets and in all the Psalms expound unto us the things which belong unto thyself, and our hearts shall burn within us, and behold at eventide there shall be a great light. Forgive our neglect of the holy testimonies. We have turned aside from them when they were difficult ; we have disobeyed them when they rebuked the passion of our hearts ; we have done despite unto the spirit of thy counsel : but from this day forth, by the mighty energy of God the Holy Ghost, we would read the Book with a new feeling, a new love, and a new hope, assured that we shall be made glad with a new satisfaction. Now help us to bear the burden of life. Enable us to smile amid the clouds as if we had caught the great light shining far beyond them and had known its meaning. Permit us to exemplify in our life how good a thing it is to trust in the living God and have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of. Thus shall we interpret thy Word to others, and men who cannot understand its hard letter will see somewhat of its benign and gracious spirit in our noble temper, in our self-sacrifice, in our great, sweet

charity. Pardon our sin, for it is great; wash us in the holy sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ thy Son: accept us in him, and may we at last be clothed with his righteousness. Amen.

THE SCOPE OF REVELATION AS SHOWN IN THE PSALMS.

WE need hardly remind ourselves that the Psalmists had not so large a Bible as we have. Yet in saying so perhaps some modification of that assurance might be allowed; because where there is one verse of the Bible there seems to be the whole Bible. It would be difficult to say where the Bible begins and where it ends; for as we grow in intimacy with its spirit and meaning we seem to feel that it has no beginning and no ending; it comes down from immeasurable heights to commune with us and help us in manifold ways without giving much account of its own origin and leaving us very largely to determine its scope by our own experience of it. In mere pages in and mere bulk the Psalmists had not so much Bible as we have. Yet in another sense they had all the Bible. He who has one word of Jesus Christ's has, if he knew how to use it, the whole gospel that lived in his heart and expressed itself in his Priesthood. When, therefore, we say the Psalmists had not so large a Bible as we have, it must be understood with these explanations.

The Psalmists regarded revelation as a storehouse of wonders. They do not hesitate to apply the words "wonderful" and "wondrous" to what they see in the scroll of revelation:—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (cxix. 18). The reader would be surprised by what he saw. He would be startled by new beauties, charmed by new music, lured on the righteous way by new persuasives. Notice the double action of the Spirit in this very exclamation. The Spirit inspired the law, dictated its letter, set it in its place; did not, then, the Holy Spirit do all that was required to be done? According to the desire of this prayer there remained something yet to be accomplished, and that something is expressed in the opening words:—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold." It is not enough to have an inspired writer, we must have also

inspired readers. We see next to nothing of the mere letter. Looking at the letter is like looking at the outside of a king's palace ; its scope, its wealth, its hospitality, its warmth are all within. So if we know the letter only, we know nothing ; we must know the genius, the spirit, the inner thought ; we must see what is to the naked eye now invisible. Here, then, is a double action of the Spirit : he inspired the writer, and he must now inspire the reader ; he first revealed the mystery to him who wrote these words, and now he must open the eyes of those who would that they may see, not the framework only and the elaborate mechanism, but the internal meaning, the spiritual thought, and feel the eternal force. The Psalmist again exclaims "Thy testimonies are wonderful" (cxix. 129). How is it that we say about this Book, the more we read it the less we seem to have read it ? Because it grows upon us. In the springtide men say to one another, as the showers fall and the sunshine gleams, we can almost see the hedges and the trees growing : the growth is so quick as to be almost measurable by the eye whilst the observer stands and looks upon the green beauty. So in the springtide of the soul, when we are made aright by the action of the Holy Spirit, as we read the inspired Book we seem to see it expand, enlarge, beautify, and we exclaim—"Thy testimonies are wonderful" : they touch the imagination at its highest point ; they give satisfaction to the keenest hunger ; they leave no aspiration of the soul without its appropriate reply.

The question that is now forced upon us is, Have we read the Scriptures so as to have seen in them "wondrous things" ? Have we read them with the microscopic eye that sees minuteness, detail, beautiful finish even in the least and remotest things, as if nothing had been done off-handedly, carelessly, or hastily ? Have we read them with the telescopic eye that sees how great they are, how planetary, how full of widest and most vital influence ? Have we caught the meaning of their elevation and nobleness ? Have we been struck with the way in which the testimonies of God have anticipated all time, so that no new Bible is needed but only a new reading of the old Bible ? What event has escaped attention ? For what set of circumstances is no provision made ? What rocks in that life-sea are unmapped ?

What wildernesses have been left unnoticed by the divine guide of life? These are questions which force from us at once a literary and a spiritual judgment. Men who are not prepared to enter into the spirit of the Bible have yet been struck by the marvellousness of its contents, by its reach of thought, by its political audacity, by its ardent and noble statesmanship. Men who have not prayed its prayers have been subdued by its poetry and amazed by its forecasts. What wonder, then, that we ourselves should speak of God's Book as no commonplace literature, but as sparkling with wonder, as gleaming with celestial lights? Herein imagination plays an important part in our religious culture. We must be caught at the point of our highest mental elevation again and again, so as to feel that we are in the hands of a Master Teacher, who has been on pinnacles which we have not yet climbed, on heights that as yet do not come within the sweep of the naked eye. Such influence is exerted upon us as we peruse the testimonies which are "wonderful."

We cannot read the Psalms without feeling how revelation is treated as a practical guide and defence:—"Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies" (cxix. 98). The Bible makes sagacious men. If any man has so deported himself as to have acquired a character for weakness, he must not ascribe his imbecility to his Bible. The Bible makes statesmen, business-men, philosophers, critics. The best business book in the world is the Bible. The corner-stone of empire is the Bible. The inspiration and sanctification of law must be looked for in the Bible. Here the witness says that through study of the divine commandments he was able to outwit his enemies, outrun them, outmatch them in every contest; his wit was keener, his vision was wider, his grasp of all things was more masterly; study of the divine Word had enabled him to set his feet on the neck of his enemies, and tell them that they only lived on his mercy. "Through thy precepts I get understanding" (cxix. 104). The witness felt the action of revelation upon the mind pure and simple: it quickens the faculties; it clears and enlarges the judgments; it sets the observer at a right angle of observation; it puts all things in their right light and perspective. The wise Bible-reader becomes

wiser by his reading. He grows intellectually. To his own surprise he handles difficulties as he never handled them before; he has leverage, and sense of vantage, and can deport himself as one who is well instructed even in regard to mysteries. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (cxix. 105). It is not only an astronomical wonder, far up among the dark clouds, only to be searched out by telescopes; it is a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the particular path which the pilgrim travels. So to say, the Bible accommodates itself to personal and domestic uses; it can be just what we need it to be,—a light along a dark country lane, a lamp gleaming upon a forest path to show us our course through all the entanglement and labyrinth of the thick wood; or it can blaze as the sun never shone even at its fullest strength. "The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (cxix. 130). These may be called tributes to the intellectual working of Holy Scripture,—its operation upon the understanding, its illumination of the mind in all its secret places. Observe how comprehensive are these claims, and how useful in the common duties of life. We all may have enemies: if we would be more than a match for the strongest of our foes we must feed upon the bread of life sent down from heaven. We all have need of intellectual quickening and illumination: if we would enjoy inspiration and light we must make ourselves familiar with the profound disclosures of divine revelation. So the Bible is not a mere ghost in the life, it is not a centre of superstition, it is not something that must be deferred to because of a great name, or an unknown history, or an immeasurable influence: it is something that is to be actually applied to the hard questions in life, it is as bread that must be eaten, it is as medicine that must be taken now and again for the heart's bitterness and sickness, it is a light that must be used for the immediate necessity. Do not let us lose the Bible by a pretended and superstitious reverence for it. We must revere the Bible and signify our acceptance of it by turning it all into practical life, by living the commandments, and by showing, whether by the shining of the countenance, the charitableness of the spirit, or the liberality of the hand, that we have entered into all the significance of the beatitudes.

This reminds us that revelation is looked upon in the Psalms as harmonising with human experience :—"The word of the Lord is tried" (xviii. 30). It is not a word which has not been put to the test. It is a rock upon which men have ventured to build the greatest houses. It is as a hand which men have grasped in the time of peril and perplexity. It is an assurance that has been put to the severest test in the sick-chamber, the market-place, in the perils of solitude and in the perils of society. "Thy testimonies are very sure" (xciii. 5). May they be compared to a long chain? then every link is strong, and every link is equally strong. May they be regarded as spoken counsels addressed to urgent needs? then every word comes with an assurance of solidity; it is not a fleck of foam, it is not a mere noise, it is not even a piece of detached music; it is solid, rock-like, most substantial, will bear to be pressed upon, and the more it is pressed upon the surer it will prove itself to be. "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right" (cxix. 128). That is a noble testimony. It deserves to be repeated again and again—"I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right." Perhaps those who have hitherto considered that the Bible has not touched upon many points may be surprised that all the while it has had those very points in view, and has kept the answer to many a secret until the world was prepared to receive it. There is more in the Bible than has yet been discovered. But the witness confines himself to what he himself has known. This man has tried the precepts—in the palace, in the dens and caves of the earth, in plentifulness, in hunger, in high noon, and in deep midnight, and wherever he has tested the precepts he has said, In all things they are right; they meet the case, they have a marvellous adaptation, their resources are unquestionable. What wonder that the same Psalmist exclaims in another verse "Thy word is true from the beginning" (cxix. 160). Who can define the expression "the beginning"? What is the beginning of Truth? As well ask what is the beginning of God! But the Psalmist has found that from end to end the word is true—true in the alphabet, true in the complex literature, true in the philosophy, true in the poetry, true in the spiritual worship. This, after all, is the great test of Scripture and of faith. We are bound to ask, How does the Scripture come down into the

market-place? it is beautiful on the wing; it flies well: how does it walk? aloft in the morning air it sings like a bird: but what does it do for men when they are laid low, when they walk in darkness, when they cry for very pain, when they seek water and there is none, when they die for help and there is no hand to touch them,—what is the Bible then? what then do all its testimonies, precepts, statutes, and songs amount to? By that inquiry we are willing that the claims of the Bible should be judged. And all formulated faith must come to the same test. The faith looks well as it is outlined in the catechism or in the book of theology; it reads fluently; there is no break in its broad and noble flow: but how does it answer in the battle? how does it stand fire? what is its colour when the storm rages and the infinite tempest tries the strength of all? A faith that will not walk as well as fly, fight as well as sing, sit up all night with the sufferer as well as go out all day with the traveller, is a faith not to be trusted, however pompous its expression, however ecclesiastically guarded its dignity, however ostentatious and solemn and exacting its sanctions. We are willing that the Scripture and that Christian faith should be subjected to the test of experience. How does the Bible wear? Let the old man speak. How does the Bible reply to the wear and tear of life? Let the most aged student reply; those who have yet to put on the armour may now be silent, and let the old soldiers stand well to the front, and tell what they have seen of the testimonies, precepts, and commandments of God.

Now the point of view changes, and the Scripture is regarded as contributing to the highest spiritual enjoyment. This is not a prison-house this Bible of God. Nor is it a school of simple and pure discipline. There is pleasure as well as duty. Hear the words: "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (xl. 8); and again: "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (cxix. 14); and again: "I will delight myself in thy statutes" (cxix. 16); and again still: "Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors" (cxix. 24); and finally: "I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (cxix. 47). It is surely something to have the witness of such men plainly written before us. There is an unquestionably

solemn side of the revelation. When we listen to the law, we are terrified by its sternness. As the Ten Commandments fall upon us like ten thunders from the angry clouds we say, Who can carry out all this penal discipline? Again and again we are humbled and made to feel how helpless we are in responding to the commandments of God. But we work, by the grace of heaven, patiently; we toil lovingly and hopefully, and presently the statutes of the Lord become our songs in the house of our pilgrimage, law is beaten into music, and discipline becomes the root out of which fair flowers spring. We must continue at the work before we can enter into the fruition of joy. We must do the will with loving patience, expecting the reward and living in the assurance of its realisation. The joy does not come at first; it is not a bubble on the water, a moment seen and gone for ever; the joy comes last, so that after difficult reading, after many a puzzled inquiry, after lighting many a midnight lamp and sitting up with the prophets and the minstrels of Israel, the evangelists and the apostles of Christ, we come at last to say Eureka! and then no man can take that spoil out of the hand that has wrought for it, and has been successful in obtaining it by the comfort and benediction of God.

The Psalmists never hesitated to say that the Bible, as they had it, met all life's deepest necessities: "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me" (cxix. 50); "I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself" (cxix. 52); "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction" (cxix. 92); "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights" (cxix. 143). A Book of which all this can be said the world will not willingly let die. Whatever is held by the heart is held longest. The friend that will sit up all night when we are in pain and weariness is not a friend we can easily cast off. Many a summer-holiday acquaintance we can well dismiss, but the friend that knows us, that sticketh closer than a brother, that is the same in winter and in summer, that is tenderer in affliction even than in joy, is a friend whose name will stand at the top, and will survive the going-away of many whose affection was superficial, and whose relation to us, though ostentatious, was flimsy.

If the Psalmists could say all this, what can we say? If the dawn was so beautiful, what of the mid-day? If the spring was so trim, what of the harvest? If I were in an accusatory mood, I should charge the Church with neglecting the systematic and thorough study of the Bible. It is not enough to dip into the Bible here and there. Such promiscuous reading is little better than an insult. Congregations do not like a regular and systematic and thorough Biblical exposition. They like to be surprised as so many children by the novelty of the text. They do not bend themselves strongly and lovingly to the study of the Book, saying, Let us have Bible, nothing but Bible, for the Word of the Lord alone endureth for ever. And I would also accuse the pulpit of yielding to the foolish desire of congregations in this matter. The use of texts has been most disastrous in Christian history. I know of nothing more perilous, sometimes more wicked, than to take a text, to detach a line from the current of its meaning, to make a motto of a revelation, to tear a limb from a body and speak of it as a unity. In these matters we have much to answer for. On the other hand, never was the Bible so elucidated as it is to-day; never was it so pictorially illustrated as it is now; never was it so cheap as it is at this moment. The best commentary upon the Bible is experience. The man who can stand up and say: I have been in affliction, sorrow, darkness, weakness, poverty, and the Bible has proved itself to be counsellor, and light, and guide, and friend, is one of the best annotators the Bible can have. As for those who wish to understand the Book, let me say, Begin where you can: begin at a parable, begin at a beatitude, begin at any accessible point, and work your way from the known to the unknown—not fitfully and spasmodically, but steadily, constantly, patiently. Blessed Book, bright as heaven when the sun has dissolved the clouds: beautiful as earth when the summer has clothed it with flowers: wondrous Book,—now all music, now all judgment,—a fountain in the wilderness, a shade as of a great rock in a weary land,—an infinite provision for the soul's infinite hunger,—not a man-made Book at all, but quite full of God, throbbing with God, burning with God, awful, solemn, sublime with God. Other books come and go, but this Book stands for ever, because the world for ever needs it.

"I WILL."

IN a great many instances in the Psalms we meet with the expression "I will." Let us take these words as indicating purpose, resolution, solemn determination on the part of the writers, and learn in what direction their best thoughts moved. The instances in which the expression "I will" occurs are practically innumerable; so we must be content with specimens, and not aim at exhaustion

What is the signification of "I will" as used by the Psalmists? Does the expression relate to mere impulse? or is it founded upon reason? Everything will depend upon the reply we are able to give to that inquiry. The "I will" itself may be as often wrong as right. Everything depends upon its association. Happily in the case of the Psalmists there is no difficulty in finding out the real measure and intent of this formula of determination. First of all, it is evident that the Psalmists had a good reason, and that on account of the solidity and richness of their spiritual reason they were able to say "I will" with a distinctness and firmness amounting in themselves to an argument. Hear the proof: "I will extol thee, O Lord" (xxx. 1); that may be mere religious passion. The heart might cry out so in some mood of pleasurable excitement; or this might be a mere musician's resolution. A musician may write music without heeding the words which that music expresses. Men may write poetry without feeling its inmost spiritual meaning. Does the Psalmist, therefore, mean to gratify himself? That is perfectly possible. A man may go to church for no other reason; yea, a man may open God's own Book and read it for the sake of the English—the liquid, tender, strong, beauteous, tuneful English; saying, There is nothing like it: how it rolls and flows, and with what grace it returns, and then proceeds again to fuller expression of

some noble thought ; pausing, therefore, at the words, " I will extol thee, O Lord," we say, Does he call for harmony ? Is the spirit of music strong upon him ? Is he going to delight himself vocally, saying, at the close of his praise, That is fine music ; that is rich in tuneful expression ; there is quite a novelty in the turn of that music ? These inquiries must be answered before we can establish our fundamental point, that the " I will " of the Psalms was not an expression of a vehement desire of a selfish kind, but was based upon solid and useful reasoning. The proof is in this very quotation, " I will extol thee, O Lord ; for [because]"— this is my reason : this is not a song without logic as a song without words—" for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me." A man who is in that condition has a right to extol God ; nay, he is bound by every honourable obligation to extol the Lord. But whilst we are so talking about an ancient Psalmist, are we not involving ourselves in a corresponding responsibility ? If the Lord is to be extolled because of lifting-up and deliverance from danger and difficulty, who amongst us can be silent ? The Lord's house should vibrate with praise ; the very stones should be made to take part in the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Enough, however, that in this case we have a reason for the song.

Again : " I will freely sacrifice unto thee : I will praise thy name, O Lord " (liv. 6). So far we have nothing ; we must await the final term. In some languages we are bound to listen until the very end, because the whole meaning of the longest sentence may be in the final word. There is one language notably in which the interlocutor cannot interrupt the speaker, because he knows not until the last word what the speaker is talking about. A blessed thing to speak in that language—a language that cannot be broken in upon with rude remarks : for the speaker, in the long and involved sentence, may agree with, or differ from you vitally, but until you have heard the last word you can make no remark upon the speech. So it is in this instance, " I will freely sacrifice unto thee : I will praise thy name, O Lord "—why ? " For [because] it is good." Here then is a song of gratitude—a song of decency. Religion has its higher grounds and its lower levels. We may regard this for

the moment as one of the inferior levels. Here is a man who has seen that the name of God is good ; instead of passing by it, even in respectful silence, he says, I will sing here ; here I will build an altar, and offer freely the sacrifice of praise : it is but decent, it is but just, that I should do so. But again, if this be the case with a historical psalmist, are we not thereby drawn into similar obligations ? Have we not proved the name of God to be good ? Are we not in a position to say, His providence is kind and large ? Is there a man whose own life would not witness against him if he ventured to say that God was other than richly and eternally good ? If we have the reason we should proceed to the expression of the praise. Who has any respect for ingratitude ? To believe a man to have done you good, and yet to ignore him, make no sign to him, never to grasp him by the hand, never to say, God bless you for your goodness to me, that would be condemned as base unthankfulness. Ingratitude is not the less because it is shown towards our Father in heaven.

Take another and closing instance : "I will sing a new song unto thee, O God" (cxliv. 9, 10). Why ? "Who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword." It would be a difficult thing for David to sing a new song : has he not already sung a thousand songs ? How can he find another ? Herein is the mystery of religious music : it always opens a way for itself, and creates its own opportunities. Herein is the mystery of true religious speech : the divinely inspired religious teacher is never at a loss for further argument, richer illustration, nobler appeal. Sometimes he says, I cannot go further, for there is a great stone wall in front of me, and not one inch beyond it can I get ; and, lo ! when he has slept awhile, and God has subtly comforted him in his spirit, he goes forward to the said stone wall, and behold it is but yellow mist, and he passes through it to see sights richer than he ever yet gazed upon ! David sang his new song for personal mercies. And we cannot really sing a song unto the Lord unless we have gone through all the experience which it tunefully expresses. We cannot sing another man's song. We say of this song, or that, It was composed for such and such a singer. What is the meaning ?

The meaning is that such is the quality of the man, and such the quality of his voice, that the sentiment and the tune will suit him supremely. We have a higher reason in the Church. Every man sings what he himself has felt; then he sings with all his powers: he himself is a living song. Until we have some such relation to our music we shall be but mechanical performers—neither inspired artistes nor true worshippers. These instances, then, will show that we are not dealing with mere impulse. This is music coming out of logic, as blossoms in the springtime come out of hidden roots: the blossoms are not showered upon the tree from the blue heavens, they are brought all the way up from the black, tangled, hidden roots—these touches of colour, these flushes of life, these mysteries of the interaction of creation. So with the songs of the sanctuary: they come out of hard thinking, hard living, secret communion, deep, vital connection with the earth and with the sun. It is even so the little blossoms show their bannerets to the spring light. They come out of the tree, the tree comes out of the earth, the earth comes out of the sun, and the sun holds on by some higher flame,—and up and up the concatenation goes till it touches the infinite Hand—the gracious throne.

Take another view. We shall now see how the praise of God offered by good men expresses the necessity of the heart. They must pray. Suddenly their voices are lifted up in holy song, and are borne away in high rapture and upon strong wings. Now we come to expressions, without which the religious life would not be complete. Yet they are expressions condemned by some thinkers who falsely suppose themselves to be religious. Let us take some instances: "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock" (xxviii. 1). Must a man "cry"? Yes, if in earnest. There is no coldness in true religion. Exclamation has its place as certainly as logic. There is no reason to withdraw confidence from those Christian communions which are distinguished by much ejaculation and exclamatory address to heaven. We may not need such methods of worship; to us indeed they may mean something that is not wholly agreeable: but who are we? Did any man ever seriously stand still and say, Who am I that I should have any opinion about

any other man? Men must work according to their capacity, and the quality of their nature, and the circumstances by which they have been surrounded; therefore, when a man says in the Church, "Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock," he may be offering as acceptable worship as if he were arguing upon something that was never disputed, and proving something that the best of the world does not really need to know. We must allow for individual characteristics in this ministry of worship.

"I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (xxxiv. 1). What good can a man do by uttering such words? He can do much good: he can rouse, excite, stimulate, call attention; and who knows but that in his crying and exclamation he may touch some answering chord in those who are suddenly arrested by his voice? There is a mystery in music we have not yet fathomed in the Church. If we were anything but a church we should put music into a higher position. She, God's daughter, is allowed to go where she likes, and find a home where she may: whereas she ought to be presiding at the Church's table, and ministering to the Church's need. Who can hear the blare of trumpet, the throb of drum, the high exclamation of a spiritual faith, without answering, and claiming kinship, and acknowledging that the nature is touched into new emotion and lifted into higher experiences?

"I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people" (xxxv. 18). So he would not sing his song alone, behind the green hedge, or under the white-blossomed pear-tree; he would not seek a solitary place in the wilderness, or wait until he was far out upon the sea, before he began the divine sacrifice. He would rather say, Where are the people assembled? Where is the largest representation of the human family accessible to me? I will no sooner go into the great congregation than I will begin to sing and to praise God. When a man preaches he excites contradiction. There is no living fool that cannot find fault with a preacher. But when we sing God's praise we are brought more and more nearly together by some secret spiritual action

When we pray we seldom contradict one another. We need, therefore, to be united at some point in the service. The Psalmist says he will praise God in the great congregation—and make a congregation of it, weld it together, unite it, consolidate it, fire it with one grand passion. As the army marches past we seem to hear but one footfall—a thousand men marching together in perfect time ; so when the Church is singing its hymn, though it be ten thousand strong in number, it should be but one voice, that voice being like the voice of many waters.

Now change the point of view, and see how the "I will" is sometimes associated with a negative form of expression. We have heard the Psalmist say, "I will," now let us hear him say, "I will not": "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me . . . I will not be afraid what man can do unto me" (lvi. 4, 11). This comes of true singing ; this is the result of intelligent, full, rich, spiritual praise. We get courage in the sanctuary. We may come to it coldly, despondingly, as broken men, hardly able to put one foot before another ; but as the holy process develops, as heart is brought into harmony with heart, and all hearts are conscious of the near and all-blessing presence of God, courage returns, the hands that had fallen by the side are lifted up again, and men are prepared to go out into the world boldly, fearing no man, because always fearing God only. But the Psalmist has to be brought into a deeper experience than this—the very last experience into which men pass in spiritual education, especially such men as the Psalmist—sons of the mountain, children born in danger, and living all their lifetime amidst storms and tempests ; men who are called upon to be always on the defensive, to be watching for the enemy, and to be repulsing the advancing foe. This is the experience to which the Psalmist is now brought, and to which every man must be brought if he would see God in all the fulness of his beauty, and realise God in all the comfortableness of his presence and grace.

"I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me" (xliv. 6). Now he will be a son of God. So long as he held that bow in his hand we said, He is still proud, self-confident ; watch how the fire comes and goes in his eye ; see how

he trembles with conscious strength ; that hand never missed ; when it drew the bow the arrow went straight to the mark ; and he still has his bow in his hand, but now he lays it down he may begin to pray. So long as he keeps his sword by his side, we say, He is trusting to that sword ; it is good steel ; it has often been used to great advantage in the field ; it is long, strong, sharp ; it is historical steel—see how he handles it, with the familiarity of love. The work of grace is not yet complete in him. In a moment he feels for the sword, and having touched it he says, I am all right, I have got my friend by my side. His education is not complete. But now, presently, he takes out sword and sheath, and lays them both down, and says, “I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.”

Can we join the Psalmist in all these determinations, positive and negative ? Perhaps we may have some difficulty in choosing the point of union. But there is one point now to be named at which we must unite with him, heart and soul, or there is no hope for us. Here comes the beginning of the gospel : here is the publican before the time ; here is the New Testament written in Old Testament ink : “I will declare mine iniquity ; I will be sorry for my sin” (xxxviii. 18). Now the king comes very near to us. We are not all musicians ; we cannot discourse to God upon an instrument of ten strings ; but here, when he says, “I will be sorry for my sin,” we can say, each for himself, “And so will I : God be merciful to me a sinner.” Not, I will be sorry for the sin of the world, I will lament the spread of public iniquity, I will grieve for the debasement and corruption of nations and governments, and the prostitution of sovereignties and rulerships ; but, “I will be sorry for my sin”—a personal confession, a personal sorrow. He who would be sorry for his own sin has no sorrow to spend on account of the sin of others. When his own sins are forgiven, and he rises up a pardoned man, he will show his sorrow for the sins of others by preaching to them, sweetly and lovingly, with all the emphasis of gratitude, the gospel of forgiveness through the Son of God.

It is good to keep companionship, then, with this man of the strong “I will.” Such a man will do us no harm. He never

proposes a mean device. We never hear him say, I will gratify myself; I will do some mean thing; I will sneer at the poor; I will trample upon the weak; I will take advantage of the helpless; I will wait until the man can hold up no longer, and then when he has come to the point of extremity I will have the property at my price, and he may go to ruin. He says, I will praise the Lord; I will extol the Lord; I will bless the Lord; I will offer sacrifices unto the Lord. It is good to keep the society of such a man. The very utterance of his vows, with so clear an emphasis, may have an educational effect upon those who follow him. Would God we had more courage! Sometimes when a man has said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," the whole neighbourhood seems to have turned in with one consent, saying, "And God helping us, so will we." We must get the will right; we must have the purpose set in the heavenly direction; then all the rest will come in due order. But how is the will to be made right? What a mystery is the will! Men write great books upon it, and then regret they ever began them. Men are lost in the metaphysics of the will. One generation of metaphysicians contradicts another, but the will abideth for ever,—secret, spiritual, immeasurable, apparently but not really accessible, capable of telling lies, capable of putting on features and characteristics which are but happy yet knavish simulations. The will! Who can reach it but the Creator? Who can cleanse it but the Saviour? Who can inspire it but the Regenerator—God the Holy Ghost? There is an "I will" of pride; there is an "I will" of the lips; there is an "I will" of momentary, evanescent, and selfish desire; but the "I will" which we ought to pray for is the "I will" of the man who said, "I will arise, and go to my father."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we bless thee that the Son of man did come to send a fire upon the earth. We rejoice that he also sent a sword abroad. We are grateful for the spirit of revolution that is in the Cross ; we rejoice that we cannot sink into indifference when we are under the inspiration of the love of God : we must awake with the morning, and toil all day, and pray in the night season, and return to the battle as men who are conscious and assured of victory, because the Lord is the truth, and is with the truth, and will bring the truth to the throne in his own time. We bless thee for all that Christianity has done for men, in uniting men, in creating a new heart in men : this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working ; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. We rejoice that thou dost take all things into thine own hands, that what treasure we have is of God, and is held in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be thine and not ours. We know that in due time thou wilt cause this saying to be true—Behold the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the headstone of the corner. Work thou who hast all power, and all the light, and to whom time has no secret, and eternity no mystery : use whom thou wilt, put forth thine own labourers and preachers and toilers in every department of Christian service ; renew their hope, rekindle their zeal and their enthusiasm, and may they know themselves to be the servants of men only because they are first the servants of God. Hear us in our domestic petitions and personal desires : where there is sickness do thou send the Comforter ; where there is weariness do thou give rest and hope ; where eyes are blind with tears do thou drive them all away ; and upon the shadowed house let fall some beams from heaven's noonday. Guide the perplexed, deliver the embarrassed from their difficulties, and lead the blind by a way they know not ; and at last through the blood of the everlasting covenant may we stand before thee in the full light, thanking God for the joy and the sorrow, the night and the day of human life. Amen.

"I KNOW."

SOMETIMES we are told that "God is unknowable," and there is, as we have often said, a sense in which that statement is a sound biblical doctrine. God is a thought too great for the created mind, but the sun is alike too great for the created house : no house can hold all the light of the sun : is

there then no sun because no dwelling-place can accommodate the whole wealth of his glory? Does not the house receive just so much as it can hold and use? and is it not glorified by that adaptation of the light? It is the same also with the garden: no garden can absorb all the light of the sun: is there, therefore, no light to be absorbed? and does the mystery of the excess destroy the benefit of that which is available? Suppose a garden to have consciousness, what reasoning could be more absurd on its part than for it to say that because it cannot entertain the whole hospitality of the sun as shown in its streaming light, therefore the sun is beyond recognition; or if there is a sun at all nothing can be known about it or done with it? That is precisely what the created mind sometimes does with the thought which is best known to us by the Holy Name GOD. The mind cannot receive all that thought, but it may be filled with as much of the glory as is possible to its conception. The Psalmist says, "I know that the Lord is great" (cxxxv. 5); "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right" (cxix. 75); "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted" (cxl. 12). It is as if a house should say, I know that the sun is great: I know that the sun is necessary to health; I know that the sun gladdens with impartial warmth the rich and the poor. This kind of practical knowledge may be acquired by persons who know absolutely nothing about solar physics or the mystery of light. It is precisely so with the idea which we represent by the term God. We may know that he is great, that his judgments are right, and that he espouses the cause of the afflicted, and yet may know nothing of his essence or of the mystery of deity. The little child plays gladly in the gladdening sunshine, and yet knows nothing of the sun as it is known to the astronomer; so the heart may rise to noble emotion, and bow down itself in adoring homage to God without comprehending all that is involved in that holy and appalling Name. The joy of my religion is in what I do understand, and the solemnity of my religion is not only in that, but also in what has yet to be revealed.

"I know that the Lord is great." That is the elementary idea. To be God at all is to be great. The dignity of this idea is in its simplicity. The word "great" is a word of one syllable;

yet no extension of letters could increase its meaning. The idea that is to do the mind good must never be so small that the mind can trifle with it. This is true of books. So long as the reader can keep ahead of the author, anticipating him, and standing above him in intellectual dignity and force, the book is of no use, and after the perusal of a few pages is laid aside as altogether unworthy of serious notice ; but given a book which is more than itself, in which there is abundant reading between the lines, in which every word has a colour which comes and goes as the reader is able to discern the spirit of the author's thought, the student is beguiled from page to page, and on concluding the reading of the whole work, he feels that he has rather begun the study of a library than completed the perusal of a single volume. The same thought holds good of sermons. A sermon is not to be a mere gathering up of words and phrases and sentences which savour, however strongly, of religion : a sermon is to be an appeal which the heart will answer, at least in some of its parts, and is not less a sermon inspired by the Holy Ghost, because it has a background and a foreground, not wholly comprehensible on the first hearing of the discourse. The earth is not less a place of gardens and wheatfields because of the firmament which is above it ; without that firmament, indeed, the earth could have neither fruit nor bread for the satisfaction of those who inhabit it. It is even so with the sermon : there are whole paragraphs which can be appropriated as the hungry appropriate bread, and yet there are mysteries of thought and possibilities of evolution which can be best symbolised by the firmament which lifts itself infinitely above the earth on which men live and toil, and prepare for other worlds. But the idea is supremely true of God. To understand God would be in reality to be equal with God. When God simply covers the breadth of the intellect, and has nothing beyond it in the way of mystery, then may man truly say that he has wholly conquered the idea of divinity, and therefore is prepared to receive higher revelations, and to go into deeper studies than any which can be covered by a name so exalted. God must always be greater than any conception of greatness we have ever formed. We must set down, when writing out our faith in firm lines and vivid expressions, the solemn truth that there is no searching of

God's understanding. It is by this undiscovered and undiscoverable greatness that we are drawn onward and upward in religious contemplation and study, and are ennobled by the thought of the very greatness which we can never fully comprehend. In our spiritual training the sense of wonder must always be struck. Imagination must veil its face with its wings before the sudden blaze which burns in all the width of the firmament, and makes the very planets dim by its ineffable light. That is the mood in which reverence begins. Without that sense of Infinitude the mind may become flippant and self-idolatrous, may make its work a trifle, and cripple its prayer into a wish that need not be answered. We are kept to the level of our work by the inspiration of our wonder. We are never inspired by that which is mean: the mountain, not the molehill, makes men stop and breathe almost religiously. Why? Because the mountain is great: it climbs high; it aims to be at the very sky; it is more than a mountain—it is a suggestion, a poem, an altar. Yet what is that mountain when taken in detail? What ten feet of it can inspire any reverence or ennoble any thought? It is in its accumulation that it rises from one degree to another until it actually appeals to the imagination with commanding authority. We must, therefore, protest against such a so-called simplicity of religion as makes the worshipper almost equal with God. The word "simplicity" must itself be redefined. Simplicity must not be confounded with shallowness; simplicity is the last result of complication, of mystery, and of majesty of thought; it is the flower which expresses all the astronomical forces which have been necessary for its creation and completion. There are those who imagine that prayer is simple because it is limited to the offering of mere requests, as who should say, Give me health, give me bread, give me success, give me wealth, give me deliverance from this awful disease or impending calamity: all these words may be true, and yet the soul may not have entered into the mystery and blessedness of the meaning of prayer. There can be no true prayer apart from deep communion with God—a reverent and humble approach towards the recognition of his nature as infinite, wise, holy, fatherly: when we come to put our requests into sentences, the sentences themselves may be concise, almost abrupt, and

certainly urgent in their tone; but they must come up not as gathered flowers which are plucked only to die, but as living flowers which are laying hold of the root, while the root is clinging to an earth, which itself is holding fast by the sun.

"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right." Without this consciousness there can be no enlightened religion. A dark superstition might be possible, but not a religion of moral confidence and rational joy. We must know of a surety that righteousness is at the heart of things: in other words, that whoever is ruler of this world he is irreconcilably opposed to everything that is perverted, untrue, corrupt, selfish, or base in any degree. Conscience must never be troubled by the character of God. Given the conception—yea, the deep and unchangeable conviction—that God's judgments are right, then the soul can patiently wait for their complete and final development. If a soul could for a moment entertain the thought that God's ways are not right, a great and darkening cloud would settle upon the whole economy of providence, and it would be impossible for the soul to pray. Who could pray to a God who might possibly make a mistake, or confound moral terms, or regard the right hand as the left, or make no distinction between light and darkness? Where conscience is sound in its persuasion, absolutely unchangeable in its conviction, that at the centre of things there is a spirit of righteousness and judgment, imagination and every other gift and faculty of the mind may reverently await disclosures which will confirm the conviction of conscience. It is this which makes us quiet amid tumult. We are prepared to say to those who look on in an irreligious spirit, Yes, the tumult is very great, the uproar is indeed deafening, a great and terrible confusion seems to have seized upon every department of life, and the very foundations of society are apparently out of course; but all that we see is on the surface, all that we observe is part of a great process which is not yet made clear; what we have to do is to trust in the righteousness of God, and to aver that, come or go what may, at eventide there shall be light, and in the summing up of things a perfect justification of all the processes through which God has conducted the world. Thinking of this kind widens our knowledge of what is actually

right. We cannot be truly anxious as to the rightness of God and his government, and yet we ourselves be doing that which is wrong, and doing it with zest and gratification. Conscience will not act in this double manner when it is honourably treated. Conscience may turn upon a man and say, You are most anxious that the Judge of the whole earth should do right, you stop in the reading of your Bible, and inquire, Is this just, is this fair, is this right? Now, seeing that you have made yourself into such a judge of righteousness, and have displayed your fertile criticism in scrutinising the purpose and the way of God, you are bound to turn to your own life to rectify its courses, and to live as one who is responsible to eternal rectitude. Here is the rock on which we stand. Successful though vice may seem to be, its mouth shall be filled with gravel, and all its teeth shall be broken. Point to the carnival of evil, hear its loud song of lewdness and passion, watch its whirling dance of defiant godlessness, listen to its unholy speech, behold its open throat, hot with fire that cannot be quenched, and you see the make-believe of true joy—a false light that shall be put out—an excitement that being unrestrained by reason, and uninspired by reverence, shall perish in a reaction that shall involve the soul in the horrors of self-contempt. Right alone is eternal. Virtue alone has no painful recoil. Sweet prayer always brings back sweet answers. At the last, vice biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder; at the last virtue blooms into a larger summer, and enters the enjoyment of a broader heaven.

"I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted." Not will prevent affliction overtaking me, and reducing me to the last point of humiliation, but will see that however great may be my affliction it shall in no degree interfere with my integrity. The text is thus morally stronger than at first sight it would seem to be. Our first impression is that God is interested in a man simply because the man is afflicted; that is to say, God is very pitiful and kind, and seeing a poor wayfarer overborne by the fatigues of the day, takes notice of him, and cheers him by some kind word of sympathy and stimulus. However true that doctrine may be in itself, it is not the immediate doctrine of Psalm cxi. 12. The Psalmist is still talking about right; in this

very verse he brings in the poor saying, "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and the right of the poor."

In another Psalm (ix. 4) we read, "Thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right." So we are not dealing with instances of mere pity and sympathy, we are in the presence of a man who has been overpowered, impoverished, and in every way ill-treated and afflicted; and yet God will not judge the man by the circumstances in which he is placed, saying, Surely this must be a bad man, or these afflictions would not have overtaken him. God will search into the case, and understand the man's character; and according as that character has been sound in its purpose and aim, God will vindicate the man, though he have no other friend in all creation. The man himself shall be brought into liberty, and in his blessed freedom shall lift up his voice in holy song, saying, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." We may, however, turn from this sterner aspect of the truth, and regard God as deeply interested in the afflictions of his people. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." We are to account it all joy when we fall into divers trials, knowing this, that the trying of our faith worketh patience. Jesus Christ himself taught the same soothing and encouraging doctrine, saying, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." The Apostle Paul, gathering all his afflictions together until they became quite an agony, said in the midst of his intensest suffering, "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." An ancient witness stands up before the ages, and says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray;" and the universal testimony on the part of those who have accepted suffering as discipline imposed by heaven is that it was good for them to be afflicted. Without affliction we become haughty, self-dependent, unsympathetic, selfish; instead of being grateful for our own health we use it for the purpose of taunting men who are weak, and we tell them in bitter reproach that if they had done as we have done their robustness would have been equal to our own. Very merciful and gracious is the way

of God in the dispensation of affliction. Blessed be his name ; he knows exactly what affliction we can endure, how much we need, at what times it ought to give us the severest pain ; if we accept our afflictions in this spirit we shall almost welcome them, knowing that however bitter the process the end is to consolidate our faith, to brighten our hope, and to prepare us for the infinitely glorious revelations with which God intends to enrich us. Then the Psalmist tells us that he knows God is great, and that God is right ; we accept the terms as indispensable to what we may describe as the completeness of deity. But there are senses in which these words are very hard. We acknowledge their sublimity ; but who could live upon that which is sublime ? God must be more than sublime, he must be tender ; he must visit us in the darkness, and his voice towards us must be accommodated to our weakness, not being a display of his majesty or a proof of his power to thunder in the universe, but a sign of his knowledge that our infirmity is very great, and our distress almost intolerable. Here, then, we may take our stand boldly and firmly. We acknowledge that God is unknowable in any intellectual sense that is self-satisfying : the Bible, as we have said before, is continually declaring this doctrine, and insisting upon its importance ; but now we stand upon these three truths, which in reality are one—God is great, God is right, God is pitiful. These doctrines are sufficient for all the purposes of this life ; when we are prepared to receive broader revelations of the divine essence and majesty they will not be withheld from us. Meanwhile let us keep the commandments ; cling lovingly and with growing intelligence to Jesus Christ and all the solemn truths involved in his priesthood, and let us feel how blessed is that servant who is found ready to receive his Lord whenever his Lord may come, and to enter upon the enjoyment of fuller light, and discharge the duties of wider service. Let us write upon our houses, our churches, our literature, our whole life, the sublime and ennobling motto, *God is great, God is right, God is good.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, our hearts cry out for thy heart as for a place of sweet and secure rest. Open the door and bid us come! The sin which we thought was dead was but asleep, and it has stirred up its cruel power more mightily than ever, and has thrown us down in the face of the sun and mocked us in our vain resistance. This cruel sin will get the better of us, not wounding us only and filling our own soul with pain, but will utterly destroy us, if thou dost not come and save us. But thou wilt come; even now thou art at the door; even now the angels of God are round about us. Thou surely lovest us, yea even his sins seem to endear the sinner to thee, if but his heart know its own bitterness, and there be one word of repentance on his tongue. We repent and then we sin again; we renounce the enemy and then we fly into his arms. What can reach such guilt but the blood of Christ? It is in vain that we tarry at the rivers of earth, we hasten, impelled by fear and hope to the great Cross, the Cross of Christ, the mighty, the infinite, the only Saviour of mankind. Why dost thou spare us? Is there yet upon us some broken image of thyself? Amid all this ruin dost thou see one line of beauty? Surely thine own eye alone can see it, for it is an eye of most piteous compassion. Speak to us some comfortable word, and leave us not without one token of thy love. We want to know more fully the riches of thy truth. What is truth? Who can tell what is hidden in that glowing mystery? May our ignorance make us modest; may thy promise make us hopeful. Oh for clearer insight, for keener sympathy, for more constant love. Lord, hear us; blessed Saviour, send us answers that shall make us glad. Look upon us all as the sun looks upon the whole earth; let the cloud of thy blessing gather thickly and fall upon us according to our several need, and we shall be made glad with pure and exulting joy. Spare us yet a little longer; yet, Lord, why should we pray thus? Were it not better to pass on, to stand in the light, and to be clothed with the liberty of a perfected redemption? We call this desire to remain our love of life, only because we do not know what life is; it may not be our love of life, it may be but our fear of death. Lord abolish death in us; let it have no place in our outlook and forecast; may we be so filled with Christ that we can see nothing but our immortality. Lord hear us. Lord keep us. Lord abide with us till this night-life be gone, and the morning be fully come. Amen.

Psalms cxlvi.-cl.

THE GRAND DOXOLOGY.

HOW could the Book of Psalms end but in this way? Psalms cannot end in prose. Whether the arrangement is mechanical or inspired, it is the best possible. There is a

fitness of things, and that fitness is realised in this peroration. It is as if a great broad river had suddenly become a resounding cascade ; these five psalms are the final cataract. The Psalmist will have everything pressed into the choir. He will not have a small band. He ranges creation through, and brings everybody and everything into the orchestra. There goes out from him a great sound, "Praise ye the Lord." Not only will he deliver this exhortation, he will exemplify what he means, and therefore he continues, "Praise the Lord, O my soul." We must be on fire ourselves if we would set other people on fire. "While I live will I praise the Lord : I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." He will have all instruments pressed into this service. He knows all the instruments by name ; he says, There are three sorts of instruments at least : the wind instruments, which a man seems to play with his soul—"the Lord breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and with that heaven-given afflatus the truly praising soul addresses itself to the instrument ; and there are stringed instruments—as the harp and lute—to which a man speaks through his hands, the soul running out at the finger-tips ; there are also percussive instruments which a man must smite, as the drum, and the tambourine, the cymbals, the triangles, and instruments many. So he would have skilled fingers that know how to operate upon stringed instruments, and skilled strong fingers and hands—quite a muscular service—to make the drum throb, and take a share in this offering of hallelujah and acclaim unto God. He must have read all the Psalms before he wrote these five. He seems to have written all the Psalms as well as read them. There is a way of reading a book, which is the next best thing to having written it. To hear the book well read, to hear your own letter well uttered ! There is an authorship of reading. It would seem as if this man had taken up all the great psalms and had rewritten them in his heart, and had come out at last with an appropriate conclusion.

In these five psalms we have great burst of praise. The instruments were made for the psalms. Everything was made for the Church. Perversions many there have been, and probably will be, but they are perversions, and must be recognised

and stigmatised as such. No bad man has a right to any instrument of music. He holds it by no right that can be established in the court of equity ; he does not know how to handle that thing of beauty, he does not know how to speak to that secret of sweet sounds. There is nothing more horrible than that a blaspheming man should sing at a sacred concert. There is no irony so unpardonable. Christian men should not support it. Christian service should be rendered by Christian people. For a man who has been guilty of anything that is vilely wrong to sing in any of the great oratorios is a lie seven times told ; a black and most pestilent thing—quite a horrible outrage to taste, to decency, to the genius of piety. Some have supposed that the Psalmist really did not desire to have all these instruments, but that he is simply struggling or working his way towards a great human appeal, namely, Praise ye the Lord : especially let Israel praise the Lord ; he is simply trying to construct a great altar of Hebrew music. Grammatically that may be partly right ; in a narrow sense of the terms, the Psalmist may have been fixing his thoughts wholly upon the human temple, and when he calls for a universal song his universe may have been restricted to Israel. Some men do not know the meaning of their own words. Great religious utterances have to be interpreted to the speakers themselves. Isaiah might profitably listen to a modern discourse upon his own prophecies, and be told what he meant when he used his own mother-tongue. I prefer, therefore, to take the larger construction, and to believe that the Psalmist was seeking to press everything into God's service. He saw that the universe itself is silent music, a dumb poem, a most marvellous miracle in the expression of fitness, interdependence, harmony. Said he, This great universe wants but one little spark to fall upon it, and the whole will rise as if in flames of praise. Man has nothing to do in the way of improving the universe. Poor man ! he can but take a little part of the universe to pieces, and call it science. He cannot improve the rotundity of the earth, he cannot add a beam to the moon. The Psalmist, looking upon these things from a great height, said, All this means something more than has yet been articulated : this silence is supreme eloquence, this is all that prose can do : God is waiting for the man whom he will inspire

with the spirit of poetry, and if that man will let fall one short syllable on this miracle of prose it will become poetry infinite, ineffable. It will be a sad thing when a man can tell all he means. Do not believe that the grammarian can exhaust the Bible. Do not entertain the thought that the Bible-writers knew one ten-thousandth part of what they were writing about. They were instruments, they were the clerks of God, they were but scribes hired to do the work of human education. All things are tending in the direction of universal praise. If this were mere reverie, we might applaud it as such, and dismiss it; but all through these five concluding psalms there runs a line of sternest logic, boldest, truest, sweetest reasoning. This is so with the whole Bible. All its flowers are grown upon rocks; far below the fecundant soil lies the stable masonry. The flowers are thousands upon thousands, squared and cubed, and then redoubled and multiplied again; but under all there lies the base of truth.

Shall we join this praise? Which God shall we worship in song? The Psalmist says, I will give you his full address: this is the God "which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is." That is force, energy: how can I blow the instrument, or strike the string, or smite the drum in praise of force, though it be set out in strong typography on the printed page? Then saith the Psalmist, You have interrupted me, that is not the full address of the Most High; he but begins there, the continuance thereof is this, "Which keepeth truth for ever: which executeth judgment for the oppressed." That is majesty, moral, spiritual, sublime. We might raise a tremulous hymn to such a Personality, but we should almost have to look down whilst we sang the adoring psalm. But, said the Psalmist, you have interrupted me, that is not the full address of the Most High—"Which giveth food to the hungry:" now he is domestic, companionable, approachable. "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind:" now how tender, gentle, pitiful! "The Lord raiseth them that are bowed down:" then he is almost like one of them. "Praise ye the Lord." Certainly! we must. We can adore majesty, and run away from it because it may overpower us by its intolerable sublimity, but if God feed the hungry, open the eyes of the blind,

and raise them that are bowed down, we can look at him in the face whilst we are singing his hymns. But, saith the Psalmist, that is not all: "The Lord preserveth the strangers:" why, we are all strangers when we are two miles from the beaten track. "He relieveth the fatherless and widow:" what! the God of suns and constellations and universes on which no measuring-line has been laid, does he care for the widow and the orphan in their affliction? "Praise ye the Lord." Here is an end of ecstasy. This is no sentimental rapture; this is a reply, praise answering love,—a glorious consent, a concert which the universe approves. Herein must our musical education be perfected. An impious singer ought to be frowned down, avoided, and left desolate. It will be a sad thing when we admire the music and neglect the sentiment. The choir constituted by the Psalmist is a choir of appreciative, grateful, responsive hearts. Nor can he get away altogether from this line of annotation. He puts the same thought in many different ways. He does not neglect the majesty of the Lord; he represents the Lord as telling the number of the stars, and calling them all by their names; as covering the heaven with clouds, preparing rain for the earth, making grass to grow upon the mountains: he represents God as giving snow like wool, scattering the hoarfrost like ashes, casting forth his ice like morsels, and coming upon the universe with a cold before which it perishes. Then he runs parallel with all this, a line more than golden, a line more than loving: "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite:" hear how the trumpets blare and roar as they utter that glorious sentiment! Now "he healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." The Lord is the doctor of the family, the physician of the soul; as if neglecting the stars awhile, he comes down to human hearts.

Let us not then say that the Psalmist is a mere contemplatist or rhapsodist; he is a man who recognises the providential side of life, and will have a hymn appropriate thereto. If we made our providences the beginning of our psalms our psalms would never end. "He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near

unto him." "The Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation." This is the providential aspect. Here is God working in human history. Here the Lord is building his own monument of love, and writing his own memorial of tender mercy, and the Psalmist calls us around this memorial and this monument that we may join him in holy rapturous song. We should count our family mercies before we determine where our hymn shall begin and end. We are poor reckoners if we begin with our disadvantages. We do not mean to end well; we are trying, however subtly or unconsciously, to get up a case against the goodness and mercy of God. We should begin at the other end: with the sunshine and the music, with all little things and great things that make up the best aspect of our home-life. Then when the Psalmist says, "I am going to sing," we shall say, So am I: let us sing together that we may create an opportunity for others; let us announce our intention far and wide, and mayhap some will sing as followers who could not well begin the holy tune themselves. Thus praise becomes contagious, thus song begets song, until the whole universe is full of melody. There are some who have never sung. By the term "sung" we do not here mean anything that is technical or mechanical. There is a singing without words, there is a silent singing; there is a way of singing by sympathy. Sometimes people think they are not singing unless they can hear their own voices; certainly to uplift the voice is one way of singing: some can sing better through sympathy, they feel that others are expressing what they wanted to say, and in the expression of others they find rest and joy. Whether in this way or in that, every man should sing. Every man should recognise the providences of God. You were brought low, and he helped you; you were in the jungle of a tremendous thicket, and he relieved you; you were trying to thread your way through a labyrinth, and you found yourself coming back again and again upon your own steps, and he gave you the clue, and in an hour or two you were out at the wicket-gate free again, and you met the Psalmist there; for that Psalmist stands for us at every turn in life, and he said, "Praise ye the Lord;" and if you had not instantly answered in song, personal or sympathetic, you would have proved yourself unworthy of the divine deliverance

The Psalmist indicates a retributive element in the service of praise: "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron." These words have been fruitful of oppression. They have been misused by nearly all sections of the Church. No one section can blame another, saying, "You have perverted these words," because we are all in one condemnation. We have mistaken fury for reasoning: we have forgotten that the democracy is heathenism, if it be not educated and morally inspired. It is not our business to strike off the ears of men, nor to throw chains upon kings, and fetters of iron upon nobles. They have to come down—that is written in the books that cannot be burned—but they must come down otherwise; not by violence, but by the uplifting of the general mass of the people; so there shall not be so much a coming down of some as the raising up of all; then the new democracy shall be the true aristocracy. Let us beware of religious oppression above all other. No one man, as we have often seen, has all the truth, nor ought to set himself up as the papal administrator of all that is right and wrong in intellectual beliefs. This man has part of the truth, and his brother has another part; they should meet, and mutually contribute; and the third man should add his share, and every other man contribute his quota, that from the sum-total of humanity we may get the sum-total of the revelation of God. You do not improve your oppression by singing to it. You do not make murder less murder because you dance your way to the scene of execution. Keep the high praises of God for holy hearts and holy mouths.

**THUS ENDS THE PSALTER—THE ANTHEM-
BOOK OF THE CHURCH.**

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE, FOR ALL GLEANERS.

“Thy blessing is upon thy people.”—
PSALM iii. 8.

The reading should be, “Let thy blessing be upon thy people.” The Psalmist is not stating a fact, he is rather praying for the Church. David’s was a pastoral soul. A fine tone of solicitude runs through all his supplications and desires. But that which is literally a prayer may at the same time be also a fact, and in this case is proved to be so. Taking the text therefore as a fact, we are reminded that God has a “people,”—a community specifically his own; the reference is not to the total humanity, but to humanity specialised and set apart, humanity sanctified. By God’s “blessing” we are not to understand a merely external sunshine, a light which floods the path and makes the physical man radiant: we are rather to understand a light that fills the soul with morning, and that gives promise of a nightless day. When God’s blessing is upon a man it does not follow that the man is relieved from chastisement. The contrary doctrine is distinctly laid down in Scripture,—“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” A man often scourges his own child when he would not scourge another, simply because the child is his own, and he has the child’s advantage at heart. No one can come into the church for the sake

of the blessing. Then would church communion become a kind of commercial relationship. We do not come for the blessing; we get the blessing in coming. God’s blessing is often a discipline; we do not set down on some green knoll and contemplate the landscape, nor do we bury ourselves in velvet sward and look up to the blue sky with the poet’s contemplativeness; because the blessing of God is upon us we are to arise and pursue, we are to take the prey with a strong hand, and to show ourselves skilful workmen in the Lord’s service. The Lord’s blessing is therefore an inspiration as well as a benediction. Know that the blessing of God is upon you when you are going to do more work. Be sure that the divine blessing is resting largely and lovingly on you when you feel you must give away your substance with both hands that poverty may be relieved and that knowledge may be increased on the earth. When you are inclined to shut yourself up in elegant solitude, and to contemplate all life from a distance which deprives it of vividness, be quite sure that the blessing of the Lord is withdrawn from you. God’s blessing is not set upon people with the view of discouraging others, but with the view of encouraging them towards divine fellowship and divine confidence.

*"Thou hast put gladness in my heart,
more than in the time that their
corn and their wine increased."*—

PSALM iv. 7.

Let us regard this as setting side by side physical and spiritual possessions. On the one side we have what the worldly man values most, namely, corn and wine, representing all manner of physical and natural bounty: on the other hand we find heart-gladness, a peculiar music in the soul, a tender and subtle joy which cannot be represented by earthly symbols. Both the bounties are supposed to be associated with "gladness." The worldly man looks upon his corn and wine, and his whole nature laughs with selfish merriment; laying his hand upon his bounty he says, This will stand me in good stead when the day is rainy, and the winter has blocked up the thoroughfares. In the case of the spiritual man he lifts up his eyes to heaven and says, Although I have nothing in my hands, I have God in my heart, a source of strength, an inspiration to labour, an encouragement in all goodness; all the exceeding great and precious promises are singing to me like so many angel-birds sent from heaven to give me foretaste of the music that makes the home of the saved perfect in happiness. We should grow away from the appreciation of mere natural and commercial bounty. Of course it has its place in civilisation; for the body it is essential; it is right and beautiful to cultivate the earth, and God's blessing is upon all those who till the ground for his sake; but all the bounty of nature cannot touch the soul, educationally, sympathetically, progressively, except in some very distant and emblematic way. Our riches are in our consciousness of the divine presence, in our access to the divine throne, in our spiritual ideas, in our spiritual penetration, in all the attributes, ele-

ments, and forces that constitute the identity of the soul. How are our memories stored with divine promises? What hope have we for the scene beyond the earth? What are our soul's companionships? What quality of intercourse is our supreme delight? When we can answer these questions satisfactorily we are rich; we have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of; we quench our thirst with the wine of divine love; and our soul knows no pang of hunger. Other property can be consumed. Other property can go down in value. Other property can be stolen. But the property of the soul—the inheritance of the mind—those great and glorious ideas which drive away all darkness from the horizon, these are in very deed "unsearchable riches," the very wealth of God. All these gifts come through well-defined processes. They are not imposed upon men like burdens; they grow up in the souls of men like divinely inspired and directed comforts. Whoso does his duty, whoso suffers bravely and uncomplainingly, whoso says, In all this sorrow there is a hidden joy, will have more than corn and wine, will have the very peace of God as an imperishable treasure and defence.

*"For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous;
with favour wilt thou compass him
as with a shield."*—PSALM v. 12.

The word "shield" refers to a shield so long and large as to be meant for one who is of gigantic stature; it was indeed intended not only to protect part of the soldier, but to defend the whole body against harm. It is said of Luther that when he was asked where he would find shelter if his patrons should desert him, answered, "Under the shield of heaven." Notice that it is always *character* on which the blessing of God rests. God will "bless the righteous,"

will bless pure character, will not forsake uprightness of soul, will follow with his favour the life that rests in him and looks to him for law as well as for consolation. We need not trouble ourselves about the defence if we make an earnest business of endeavouring to produce the character; in other words, if we endeavour daily with constancy of prayer and practice to become "righteous." The picture of the text is that of a man who is shielded all over,—verily *compassed* with a shield; we are at liberty to strain the figure, because the meaning is that we are to be defended by God at every point and on every side, from head to foot, behind and before, so that there shall be no place accessible to the enemy. Beautiful is the idea that favour or grace is to be the encompassing shield. There shall be no burden in bearing this defence. It is not duty, it is not discipline, it is not self-immolation that supplies the shield; it is God's grace, God's tenderness, God's gentleness. God is equally strong at every point, by the very necessity of his Godhead; his tenderness is as invincible as his almightiness. His tears are as terrible to the enemy as are his thunderbolts. The soul that reposes in God can say lovingly and gratefully, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Those who are in Christ are continually exclaiming, "By grace are we saved." We stand and live, we act and suffer, not in the omnipotence of God as an abstract attribute, but in the love of God, which is his almightiness in its most tender and helpful attitude. If the Lord is with us, who can be against us? If we are right, how can we be weak? If righteousness could finally go down in any conflict, God himself would go down in that collapse. The righteous God is the Almighty God. Let us therefore trust him with loving hearts, never questioning either

his ability or his willingness to interpose for us according to our varying necessity.

"My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart."—PSALM vii. 10.

This follows the previous text with remarkable propriety. The text might read, "My shield is upon God;" in other words, God is my shield-bearer.

"On God is cast
My defence, and in him lies,
In him who, both just and wise,
Saves the upright at heart at last."

This is Milton's translation. Here again we come upon the vital element of character. Perhaps a distinction may be drawn here, apparently fine yet not without a large measure of reality. Not only do we read of the upright, but of the upright in heart: there may be a formal uprightness; a conventional behaviour; a mere attitude of morality; on all this no blessing rests; but where the heart in its main purpose seeks to be right and true, seeks to fashion itself upon the will of God, and to obey the statutes of God, then God himself is the shield-bearer of such a character, and in order to injure that character God himself must first be overthrown. We are to remember that God himself judges the righteous. He seems to come to us every day to know how our character is bearing the wear and tear of life. The rule is not Once righteous always righteous; we are judged daily. The Psalmist himself prays, "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is within me." He adds, "The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." Here, then, we are called to self-examination, to daily culture, and to all the processes which involve the largest and fullest education of the soul. Do not let us defend ourselves. Self-defence is needless in the case of the righteous.

His cause is hidden with God; the Almighty holds his cause in his hands, and will defend him with omnipotence alike of strength and of wisdom. We lose time by self-defence. We lose our lives in trying to gain them. If we would but do our duty and leave our defence with God, we should have peace like a river, and our righteousness would be for fulness and strength like the waves of the sea.

"The words of the Lord are pure words."—PSALM xii. 6.

Purity would seem to be impossible upon earth. Even where we have divine treasure we have it in earthen vessels, and the danger is that the vessels shall in some degree corrupt the treasures. All human words are tainted with alloy. Even when men make their best promises there is of necessity an element of selfishness in the pledge. If the heart is deceitful, the words must partake of the quality of the heart. There is an unconscious deceitfulness, there is an unconscious self-deception. We may mean every word we say, and yet our deceit may be more subtle in its action than our intellectual energy. The intellect goes out to do some work, and does it earnestly and well, but no intellect can keep pace with the subtlety and swiftness of moral action. The heart can outrun the head. It is characteristic of divine words that they are themselves divine. They are as silver melted seven times in a furnace of earth. God has spoken nothing in mere excess for the sake of emphasis. In the case of the divine promises, it is simply impossible that the emphasis can be equal to the meaning. We can test the purity of the divine word by submitting it to daily practice. The pureness of divine messages is not an intellectual question but is almost exclusively a moral inquiry. How do

the words of God go down into the life? How do they stand the strain of temptation, and self-expenditure, and the daily conflict of life? The words of God are few, because they are pure. God does not need to multiply words in order to assure us of his earnestness. Eloquence is often a sign of insincerity. Mere fluency is always to be distrusted, because life itself does not flow out in so easy and unimpeded a strain. The speech of life should represent the tragedy of life,—its ups and downs, its swift fluctuations, its sudden surprises, its fears, and its hopes. The speech of a wise man is a skilfully painted texture. The continuance of the Bible as the highest and strongest factor in civilisation depends wholly on the pureness of the divine words. Because of their pureness they shall endure for ever.

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"—PSALM xiii. 1.

He who would see how swiftly the moods of the soul can change should study this thirteenth Psalm. In some half-dozen verses the soul goes through all the gamut of spiritual experience. The first tone is one of despair, the last tone is one of high song—"I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." This may be a parenthesis in the history of David; about that time when his life was in daily peril, when he dare scarcely close his eyes in momentary sleep, because his sleep might be his death. Nothing makes us more conscious of time than pain. The darkness is longer than the day. Deprivation always develops consciousness, and makes the soul feel the oppressiveness of a heavy burden. To a man in perfect health, engaged in the usual and happy avocations of life, there seems to be no time; he is

wholly unconscious of any painfulness in the passing of the successive hours. But let a man be in pain, and every tick of the clock is an eternity. There is a quality of punishment, there is also a quality of time; the man who suffers is conscious of eternal torment; to tell him that his torment will be over in a few minutes is hardly to relieve his case at all, for every moment that comes is as long as a lingering day. It is instructive to remember, whilst we are consoling ourselves with the comforts of God, that in spiritual experience there are times of positive blankness and darkness. We are then inclined to blame God, because we think the action is wholly on his side. There are times when the soul is quite sure of its own rectitude, and then it begins to dwell painfully and almost resentfully upon the mysteries of divine providence. Instead of saying, How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? we should say, What have I done to bring upon me this sense of divine neglect? Is the divine Being capricious; has he gone away simply for the purpose of afflicting me, and making me feel my weakness and littleness? Have I grieved the Spirit of God? Has he not retired because there has been in my heart unexpressed rebellion against his dominion? Happy is he who is conscious that the divine face has turned away from him. When we suppose that God is still gracious to us, notwithstanding our self-contradictions and moral wanderings, we have lost that sensitiveness which is the truest test of real spiritual-mindedness. To miss God, to cry out for God, to desire his return, all these emotions have indeed their painful aspect; at the same time they should be accepted as proofs that the soul is still conscious of its need of God, and is restless until he returns.

"... *The saints that are in the earth.*"—PSALM xvi. 3.

Take this as indicating the mixed character of human society. Even if we had no Bible it would be impossible to deny that human society is composed of conflicting and irreconcilable elements. We find in the same community honesty and dishonesty, simplicity and duplicity, faithfulness and faithlessness, generosity and selfishness. The Bible does not create these distinctions; it recognises them. We have magnanimous men, and men of little mind: on every side we see men who take large and generous views of life, and men whose views of life are small and suspicious. Why, then, is it impossible that there should be men to whom the word "saint" should be applied? By "saints" understand holy men, separated men, men who live and move and have their being in God, men who test everything by divine standards. Has there ever been a time when the earth has been totally void of saints? By saints we are not to understand men who are perfect, but men whose aim is to discover God and to obey God. A saint is no good in any final sense. He is only good in his purpose, in his relations to other men, and in his aspirations towards God. Beside the holiness of God there is no purity. God chargeth his angels with folly, and the heavens are not clean in his sight. Yet, according to the common use of language, and according to a very high moral standard, there are moral men, honest men, upright men, saints, peculiarly and distinctively men who draw their life and their inspiration from God. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous. Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him. They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I number up my

jewels. There is no indiscriminateness in the judgment of God. The Lord separateth men as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. Continually the Lord distinguishes between good and evil, light and darkness, and his judgment is directed according to the character of those who are set before him. To the righteous heaven itself is small; to the unrighteous all punishment is eternal. The saints are the salt of the earth. The saints are the light of the world. The saints are the security of the world. For the sake of ten righteous men, who can tell how many cities the Lord is now sparing? Who can tell how much we are indebted even for physical advantages to the praying souls in the neighbourhood in which we live? Life is not the flat and superficial thing which atheism would have us believe; it is profound, subtle, infinite; the elements and forces which it touches are beyond all reckoning. So long as there are good men upon the earth, the earth will be precious in the sight of God. Let us rejoice when the godly are multiplied, for in their increase is there multiplication of prayer and multiplication of holy service.

“ . . . *Marvellous lovingkindness.*”—
PSALM xvii. 7.

The word “lovingkindness” would have been enough by itself, yet here is the word “marvellous” attached to it as if to help out the wholeness of its meaning. We read in another place of the marvellous goodness of God. We read also that God did great and marvellous works in the field of Zoan. The finest expression of this kind we find in the speech of Paul, wherein he speaks of the “marvellous light” of the Gospel. It was not light only, but marvellous light. There was a dis-

tingtiveness of glory about it which dazzled the eyes of the soul. This is the experience of every man who comes into close and vital association with God. He is continually surprised at the bounty of heaven, at the tenderness of the divine fatherhood, at the largeness of the divine love; surprise follows surprise in ever-growing amazement, because imagination is left behind, and expression utterly fails when the goodness of God is contemplated. We must not reckon God's providences amongst common things. They do not belong to a class, as if they were parts of a whole. They are individual, outstanding, altogether unique and special. So the Bible must not be set in a row with other books, it must have no common enumeration; for ever it must be *The Book*, the one Book, the only Book, the marvellous Book. We cannot overtake God and enter into competition with him: we light our candle, but we must not hold it to the sun. The candle itself, could it speak, would say when the sun arose upon it, This is a marvellous light! So say all the stars, as they retire from the majesty of the advancing morning. Let us glory in the specialty of divine communications and heavenly revelations.

“ *With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.*”—
PSALM xviii. 26.

God is to us what we are to God. This is the explanation of all difficulty, and it is also the secret of all spiritual growth. It is in harmony with what Christ says, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” The pure mind finds purity everywhere. The corrupt mind everywhere finds corruption. Man is mirrored by all nature. If we go into the Bible with

the heart of a little child, we shall come out of it rich with flowers and fruits. If we go into the Bible in a merely critical spirit, for the express purpose of finding fault, we shall return from our studies loaded with discrepancies, difficulties, mysteries, and objections of every kind. Let the pure mind review the way of Providence in history, and everywhere it will find indications of purpose, discipline, and ultimate harmony and sanctification. Let the mere faultfinder read any history, and he will grow indignantly eloquent upon the inequalities of life, and upon the consequent favouritism of God. The word "froward" may be regarded as meaning twisted or perverse. The froward mind is twisted round, is crooked, is directly opposed to the whole idea of being straight or upright. What can such a mind see in nature, in history, or in revelation, but something that reflects itself? The lesson to us is to keep our minds in a right condition. To bring the mind into a right condition the heart must be first put into right relation to God. The heart governs the mind. We not only lose the blessings of divine revelation by having a froward mind, we lose all the teachings of life, all the benefits of trustful communion, and all the repose of perfect confidence in each other's sincerity. A perverted mind is a suspicious mind. Suspicion never enriched the soul with a single thought. Suspicion inflicts deadly injustice on all upon whom it falls. Not only, therefore, is there a religious bearing to this text, there is a personal and social bearing, a family and commercial bearing, a natural and artistic bearing. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. When the mind is pure, all nature will become of kindred quality.

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."—
PSALM xx. 7.

In the Hebrew poetry the word "trust" is omitted. The literal translation has been represented thus: *These in chariots, and these on horses; but we in the name of Jehovah our God make boast.* The circumstances under which the text was written probably pointed to a Syrian war. Syria rejoiced in the number of her horses and chariots. The true Israel are upright in soul, are pictured as beholding all the glittering and prancing host, and as setting up confidence in the name of God in opposition to such physical resources and securities. It is possible for men to put their trust in the merely material. But riches make to themselves wings and flee away. The strong man is daily weakening; the mightiest is but hastening to his tomb. All nature is itself a protest against putting confidence in its resources. The hills crumble; the sea makes inroad upon the rocks; the winter exposes the caves of the forest. Nature will not permit false alliances with herself. She proclaims herself to be but a type or emblem of higher things; every separate feature of nature points to the creating and sustaining Hand; we cannot therefore make nature a party to our sin or our folly. Rightly interpreted, nature fights for God. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The hailstones were part of the artillery of heaven when the enemy dared Jehovah to battle. The nature of the trust is determined by the quality of the object that is trusted in. If we are trusting in something that is itself fickle or transitory, our confidence must partake of its qualities. He who trusts in the Eternal is eternally safe. He has no need to reckon or compute or arrange as to

contingencies and possibilities ; he says,

God is my refuge and strength, therefore will not I fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Doom is written upon every part of nature. When the great stones of the temple were pointed out by the disciples, Jesus instantly told them that in a short time not one stone would be left upon another. Though we mount up to the heavens and make our nest in the stars, yet shall God pursue us and tear us away from our false refuges. Why should we live a life of folly by trusting for eternal security to things which are themselves temporary? Let us allow that they are good for a season : they are momentary conveniences : they have their high and beneficent uses : but being in themselves temporal, they must of necessity go down by mere flux of time. We are not to trust in the name of the Lord simply for self-protection. We are not to make a mere convenience of God. They who remember the name of the Lord should prove their remembrance by their character. It is blasphemy to trust God in extremity, and then to serve ourselves when the extremity is overpast. Thus, again and again, and at every point, in our perusal of Biblical history, we come down to the solemn and abiding question of character. What are we? What is our supreme purpose in life? What are we in relation to God when there is no fear, when no danger threatens, and when everything seems to be going according to our own disposition? The Psalmist, speaking of chariots and horses, says, "They are brought down and fallen." Speaking of those who remember the name of the Lord their God, he says, "They are risen and stand upright." The picture is very vivid. It is that of one army pitched against another, and the one army thrown down into the dust and trodden

upon by the army that has not lost a man. Blessed are they who fight under the divine banner and who trust to a righteous cause, for at eventide they shall bring home the victory.

"His glory is great in thy salvation."—

PSALM xxi. 5.

In this psalm the poet is giving thanks for victory. The twentieth and twenty-first Psalms may refer to the same event. Both these compositions are part-songs. They are also choral. The soldiers are returning from war, and are met by a chorus of maidens shouting praise to the delivering God. The poetry is not equal to the moral enthusiasm of the occasion. We are called upon to contemplate God's glory as being great in human salvation. We thus enjoy the basis and the application of the thought. It would seem to be beneath Almighty God to care for a world so small and foolish as ours. It is not for us to estimate even our own worth. It does not become us to say that the world is insignificant, mean, or worthless ; it is the work of God ; what God has thought it worth his while to make, he may well think it worth his while to redeem. We do not see the whole world, nor do we comprehend all the issues of its discipline and nurture. When Jesus sees the travail of his soul he shall be satisfied. To save one soul is glory enough for any mortal man. What must it be to save the souls of all men, the souls of the ages and centuries incomputable? It is the delight of God to save, to redeem, to construct ; the function of the enemy is to overthrow, to weaken, to debase, and to bring all life into dishonour. The course which the enemy has taken is the easier, since it is always easier to destroy than to construct. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons,

which need no repentance. What joy shall there be when the whole world is brought to Christ as his prey taken in the fight, taken at the spear-point ! We glorify God by our goodness. God does not exist to be glorified in any sense of being merely hailed and saluted by songs and rapturous applause. When we are most quiet we may be most really glorifying God. By meekness, by pureness, by gentleness, by quiet spiritual wisdom, by accepting the lot of life in a spirit of self-sacrifice, we may be bringing true glory to God. Do not think of the glory of God in any merely magnificent sense. We must change our definition of magnificence. In the sight of heaven it may be magnificent to be poor in spirit, gentle, and meek ; and it may be mean and contemptible to own estates and crowns and sceptres. It is upon moral emotion, aspiration and service that God sets the seal of his blessing.

“ *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will shew them his covenant.* ”—PSALM xxv.

14

All religions have their *arcana*, or secrets known only to those who are within. The religion of the Bible does not disdain to acknowledge its own secrets, and to drive away from its archives those who come with irreverent curiosity to pry into the contents of revelation. By “secret” we are here to understand familiar intercourse. The word here rendered “secret” is traced to a word which means couch ; the idea is that of two friends seated upon the same couch holding confidential intercourse. The talk is as between companions, and is conducted in eager whispers. God is represented thus as bringing to a loving heart his own peculiar messages and communications, which he will not publish to the general

world. God has so made his universe that its various parts talk to one another. Men hold friendly and confiding intercourse. The sun is full of lessons, so are the flowers, so are all the winds that blow, so are the forests, and so are the oceans. All these may be said to be open secrets ; that is to say, men may discover their meaning for themselves, by comparison, by the study of analogy, by the watching of the coming and going phenomena of nature. But beyond this open revelation there is a secret covenant. God calls his children into inner places, and there, in hushed and holy silence, he communicates his thought as his children are able to receive it. “He will shew them his covenant :” he will read to them his own decrees ; he will be his own interpreter, and make plain to the heart things that are mysterious to the intellect. We are to remember that in holding these secrets we do not hold them originally or as if by right ; we hold them simply as stewards or trustees, and we are not to make them common property. The heart should always know something that the tongue has never told. Deep in our souls there should be a peace created by communion with God which no outward riches can disturb. “The secret of the Lord” may not mean any curious knowledge of mere details, or of future events, or the action and interaction of history ; but it may mean, and does mean, a complete and immutable confidence that God reigns over his whole creation, and is doing everything upon a basis and under a principle which must eventuate in final and imperturbable peace. The universe is not governed in any haphazard way. This word “covenant” has been no doubt abused, perverted, or misapplied ; but its use indicates that the divine plan is sovereign, settled, unchangeable. The universe is the Word of God, and it cannot fail of its purpose. Revelation

is the heart of the Most High, and every jot and tittle of it will be fulfilled. The truly religious life is not a matter of mere intellectual intelligence or information or power of argument : it is a profound persuasion of the heart, a real, simple, solid trust in the righteousness and goodness of God." How such a trust lifts us above the fret and the anxiety of ever-changing details ! This passage is in perfect harmony with many assurances given by Jesus Christ himself. He promised the Holy Spirit to abide with the Church, to show the Church things to come, and to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto the Church. The secret of the Lord is thus an ever-enlarging mystery, —an ever-enlarging benefaction.

"Into thine hand I commit my spirit."
—PSALM xxxi. 5.

These are amongst the most memorable and graphic words in the highest human experience. Stephen used a similar expression. Our Lord himself used them in his dying moments. What a light this throws upon the action of the last enemy ! Did the men who used these words really die ? then their last speech actually contradicted itself. Here is nothing said of extinction or annihilation. The image which is represented by these terms is that of a man depositing his true life in the hands of God as a trust. Think of the beauty of this image, and be comforted. The body dies ; the house is torn down, but the tenant escapes ; the throat will no longer be used as an instrument, but the singer and his song have gone on where their opportunity is larger. All history testifies that there have been men who have risen to this height of faith. Polycarp, Bernard, Huss, Henry V., Jerome of Prague, Luther, Melancthon, and innumerable others have passed from earth into the unseen

state with these very words upon their lips. We must take these farewell words as more than sentiment. They express a confidence, they constitute an argument ; they come back upon us as a sublime assurance. Who knows what death is to those who have encountered it ? Who can say what visions are revealed to their eyes ? It should be regarded as one of the chief treasures of the Church that the men who have passed away from earth, even by a violent death, have been enabled at the last to deposit in the hands of God their spirit as a sacred trust. Instead, however, of leaving this exclamation to be the final utterance of life, why should we not make it the prayer of every day ? Why not every morning say, "Lord, into thine hand I commit my spirit" ? The meaning would then be that we have no way of our own, no merely selfish will, no desires that would escape the chastisement and the refinement of heaven. It would be but another way of putting ourselves absolutely at the disposal of God, saying, Lord, what wilt thou have me do ? I commit myself wholly to thy care. Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he will surely bring it to pass. Blessed are they who do not take care of themselves in any sense that excludes the supremacy of the divine oversight.

*"Blessed is he that considereth the poor :
the Lord will deliver him in time
of trouble."*—PSALM xli. i.

The Psalmist is here talking experimentally. He recalls the treachery of some who professed to be his friends, and he pours a eulogy upon those whose honour and sympathy he had tested in a crucial hour. There is nothing to show who wrote the psalm, yet in its speech there is a tone that touches all hearts. By "the poor" we are not to understand in all cases the penniless

Poverty is a large word, and requires a large definition. Sickness, weakness, fear, sense of helplessness, sense of desolation—all these may be brought under the definition of poverty. Some men are poor mentally, needing continual suggestion, direction, and recital of mind. Want of money is the most superficial kind of poverty. It is by no means to be neglected either by the individual or by the state, because through want of money men often perish through lack of other things. When money is taken thus typically, then pennilessness becomes a manifold disorder and weakness. The word rendered "considereth" implies a kindness of consideration. It is not only a statistical or economical view of social circumstances it is also a direct and earnest exercise of the heart. The word may also be rendered "he that understands," then the text would read, "Blessed is he that understands the poor;" by understanding we are to bring in the idea of sympathy or fellow-feeling. We cannot understand the poor simply as an intellectual study. A man may intellectually concern himself with the condition of the poor without ever knowing what it is to suffer with them. We can only understand the poor by living with them, by making ourselves part of them, by admitting them to our confidence. No man understands hunger who has not been hungry. There are dictionary interpretations of words which help us but a short way towards their true comprehension. Think of turning to the dictionary to find the meaning of poverty, hunger, sorrow, death! All the words may be neatly and clearly defined in terms, but to understand any one of them we must pass through the experience which it indicates. The blessings of the Bible are always poured upon good-doing. Never, in a single instance, do we read of men being blessed simply because they are kingly, rich, mighty,

or even intellectually wise. In the Beatitudes there is not a single blessing on merely social greatness. All the persons referred to in the Beatitudes might be extinguished to-morrow, and yet the world in all its higher social phases might not be conscious of any loss. How little the world knows of its own riches! How little we know to whom we are indebted for the preservation of our lives, and for the success of our enterprises! Some of us may to-day be reaping harvests which our fathers sowed in the fields of the poor. We do not know the harvests because they are so great. The actions done by our forefathers were so small that when we see them in their harvest form we exclaim, These actions have come up again, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundredfold.

"And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it."—PSALM xli. 6.

The poet is thus recalling his personal experience. His mind is set upon one particular individual, and this is the result of his study of that case. "To see me" is a common expression amongst ourselves; it refers to seeing a sick person, or seeing one who is in difficult circumstances, or seeing a man by particular invitation. The picture drawn by the poet is a very common one. He has unfortunately sent for a man who does not understand his case. The man is full of words; he can dilate upon the events of the time; he can ask many questions; he can be ostentatiously officious and meddlesome; but all is vanity, a veering wind, a mere noise in the air. The person sent for was destitute of the quality of sympathy. He did not know the ministry of silence. He did not understand that by a mere look, tender, lingering,

and sympathetic, he could heal a human heart. Being a newsmonger he brought in the news of the day, which is a sure proof that he would carry the news of the day away with him. "When he goeth abroad, he telleth it:" there is nothing sacred to the mere talker; there is a disease of words, a gossip which could pry and prattle about the most mysterious and tragical experiences of the heart. The man referred to by the poet talked all the while about himself, or only made such inquiries as would give importance to himself when he went away from the scene of conference. The text teaches us how important it is to entrust ourselves in trying moments only to those who are rich in Christian wisdom and sympathy. Few men know how to visit the sick. Those who are in Christ Jesus ought to be able to take rich Christian sympathy to sick chambers, and to make houses beautiful with instances of divine revelation and promise and comfort. It should not be beneath the greatest to visit the humblest. The supposition of the poet is that the person here spoken of is visiting "the poor" referred to in the first verse. The temptation is to over-ride the poor; to make a false use of strength in the presence of the poor; to bear down upon and discourage the poor; such persons should never be sent to minister to souls that are in distress. The piety of Christ's Church is not to be roughshod. The saints are to study the gentlest courtesy and grace of manner. They are to act "as becometh saints."

"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him."—PSALM xlix. 7.

The subject is limitations of influence or power, even under the most favourable conditions. Here we have a brother dying; he is surrounded by rich rela-

tions; they would gladly redeem him or give a ransom for him, and yet all their generous thought and all their hoarded wealth go for nothing. There is a point at which even love stops, and sacrifice can go no further, and the soul must bow down itself in conscious helplessness and momentary despair. The word "brother" is not merely a family word as used in this connection. It will bear a large human interpretation. Thus we have a universal law, namely, that all men must succumb to the tyranny of the last enemy. Here is the ground upon which our common humanity is realised. Wealth can create great distinctions of a social kind. Wealth can make a great difference in the tombs in which men lie; but, decorate them as we may, they are tombs still, memorials of our frailty and of our helplessness. In view of the certainties of life we ought to have great governing principles. If life were all uncertain together; if death might or might not occur; if we may possibly continue as households century after century; then we may adopt a different basis of calculation: but seeing that our breath is in our nostrils, and that our truest and tenderest relations may at any moment be broken up, seeing that death must come within a few years to the strongest of us all, certainly it is not unreasonable to pause awhile and to consider what we are and whither we are going. The presence of death amid all our living relations is the one fact which the preacher should lay hold of as supplying a fountain of exhortation. We can die in one of two ways: either as believers, or as unbelievers. Dying as unbelievers, we pass into the everlasting darkness without one solitary ray to mitigate the gloom; passing into the future as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can give one another a good hope of reunion amid imperishable conditions of blissful growth. This

latter consolation is no ephemeral or insubstantial consideration; it continually turns itself into stimulus and energy, and day by day it lightens the burden and softens the hardness of life. The Christian hope of immortality is not a future blessing; it is an immediate inspiration.

“The goodness of God endureth continually.”—PSALM lii. 1.

The Psalmist is here addressing a tyrannical spirit—“Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?” That “mighty man” may represent either a personal tyrant, a national enemy, or the spirit of all evil. The literal translation might be “hero,” used in a sarcastic sense. The meaning is that he is a mighty one at mischief. We read in Isaiah v. 22, of men who are heroes at drinking. We have therefore to deal with a mighty and overwhelming spirit. The Psalmist opposes to this awful force the consolatory and ever-sustaining thought that the goodness of God endureth continually. We are not called upon to oppose might with weakness, or to counteract the solemn and horrible fact by some merely pious sentiment or irrational ejaculation. We meet might with superior might. We encounter fact with still larger fact. The Lord must ever be infinitely greater than his enemies. If we look at them alone they appear to us to be overwhelming and irresistible; but we are not to look at them alone, but to the heavens which are smiling upon our souls, to the whole resources of Omnipotence, to the boundless stores of divine wisdom; so long as we fix our hearts upon the goodness of God, and assure ourselves of its continuousness, the mighty man or wicked hero can have no power against us. The goodness of God is not intermittent. It does not depend upon changeable moods.

Even the best of our friends may be occasionally depressed or consciously weak or uncertain in the application of his love; but in the case of our Father in heaven we have to rely upon the historically continuous, the unchanging, the permanent. Let us beware lest we break up the goodness of God into mere fits and spasms, and content ourselves with citing special instances in which we have seen unique and comforting providences. The Lord's goodness is not to be marked off as in a diary, now very high, now rather low, now somewhat doubtful. Whether we can see the direct and emphatic line of goodness or not, we can believe in its existence and in its influence. God is always equally good. His denials to our prayers are as gracious as his fulfilments. We do not see all this now, and it is not our business to see it; our one business is to have faith in God, and to be quite sure that he is good—“Good when he gives, supremely good; nor less when he denies.” The same doctrine is taught in the frequent expression, “his mercy endureth for ever.” The fact is that the goodness of God is God himself, and as he endureth continually so his goodness knows no time or change. God is not loving; the statement goes infinitely beyond and gives us as the foundation fact of our practical theology the assurance that God is Love. So God is goodness. Because God himself is goodness there can be no change in his mercy, there can be no limit to his love. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Why should we disquiet ourselves with vain thoughts, and with events that mock our vision and our hope, when we might live in the inviolable sanctuary of real union with God?

"I will freely sacrifice unto thee."—
PSALM liv. 6.

If we take the word "freely" as equivalent to freewill we see what a scope love has in the offering of sacrifices unto God. The verse might be rendered "I will offer a freewill sacrifice." Some offerings we must make, not of our own freewill but by the compulsion of nature, by all the necessities which represent the sterner aspects of life. Some tributes are forced from us. We are obliged to wait for the seasons. We are compelled to bow down our heads if not in acquiescent yet in sullen consent to the decrees of Providence. On other occasions we are, so to say, left to invent the expressions of our own love; God gives us opportunities in which we may show our real quality, and prove what we would do if we could. The great purpose of divine discipline is to work out the freewill of men. At first man would seem to have no freewill; he is bounded by laws, he is influenced by heredity, he is shut in by circumstances, he is hardly consulted as to the way in which he will spend his own life. We begin our experiences under the rod. Stern commandments say, Thou shalt, Thou shalt not, during every hour of our early existence. Then the time comes when we have a larger manhood. God gives us partial liberty. Having enjoyed this liberty without abusing it we are entrusted with still greater responsibility. As time goes on we seem to have reversed the whole plan of life and to have come into a large heritage of individual freedom. If we have profited by the discipline of life, the freedom which follows it will not be misunderstood or perverted. Freedom itself will be but a larger law. Love will begin to consider what it can do by way of repayment of the divine goodness. Thus we escape the

mere literal law, the hard and stern request and command, and come into the exercise of our larger and finer faculties. The question then is, What shall we do now that we have come under the inspiration of love, having escaped the dominion of iron law? If the home-life has been good, wise, and beautiful, children on leaving it will not forget the past, but will begin to wonder how they can recognise the very discipline under which once they chafed. Let us feel that God has given us great liberty in this matter of serving him, and let it be our business not to consider how little we can do in return, but how much.

"Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God."—PSALM
lv. 19.

Sometimes this is applied to God himself rather than to individuals. In one translation the verse is set forth thus:—

"God shall hear and afflict them,
He abideth of old:
One in whom are no changes,
And yet they fear not God."

This may be taken as the legitimate meaning of the passage, yet by a very natural accommodation the meaning may be made to set forth the fact that where life flows on in an equal stream we are apt, by the very monotony of the action to forget causes, influences, and rulerships of a spiritual and divine kind. In an obvious sense familiarity breeds, if not contempt, yet simple neglect or indifference. All things are as they have been from the beginning. The seedtime and the harvest have been favourable; all investments and speculations have been successful without a single break or exception; the family health has been sound from generation to generation; the family homestead has never been removed

what are people to think under such circumstances? There creeps over the mind a kind of feeling that these things are matters of course, and that change would be a simple impossibility. Thus prosperity itself may lead to Atheism. Thus the very continuousness of real enjoyment may lead to irreligiousness of thought; not to blasphemy or profanity but to simple forgetfulness of the immediate presence and beneficent energy of God. On the other hand, God uses change, tumult, conflict, attrition, and other agencies as means of discipline and of education. It is good for us to be thrown about in the world, to have our plans upset, to have our influence limited, and to be often stung by disappointment. Apart from these ministries we might come to suppose we had prescriptive rights and vested interests, and that God was on our side because of some peculiar favouritism. Men should not consider that their upsets and conflicts are against them; they are really for them; they mean to refine, chasten, and strengthen the mind. When we have no great experiences we do not ask any great questions; when life is suddenly turned into a tragedy men begin to think, and possibly they begin to pray. Consider the ministry of tumult, riot, sorrow, bitterness, and daily disappointment! Are all these things for nought? Is all this but a display of accident and incalculable sequence? Are we governed by freak and mood and whim? Is there not a great all-uniting and all-directing law below and above and around the whole action of life? These are religious questions, and can only be answered by religious minds. Nor must we omit the application of the more legitimate construction of the passage. God himself is unchanging—unchanging in his love of righteousness, in his hatred of wickedness, in his protection of all

honour and virtue, and in his purpose to bring the world to high character through the medium of what we know as the blessed and everlasting Gospel. Because God is unchangeable, let us trust him. Because God is unchangeable, let us not presume upon the weakness or incertitude of his laws. Because God is unchangeable, let us confidently and gratefully believe that the wilderness shall blossom as the rose, even though at this moment it be but boundless sand, sterile and unfruitful rock.

"For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds."—PSALM lvii. 10.

The Psalmist sings of mercy and truth. Rightly analysed, there are no other elements in the great songs of the Church. We here come upon a noble strain. It is right that in the growth and expansion of our religious life we should frequently accustom ourselves to the contemplation of that which is grand and majestic. It is of course right that we should always think of God as merciful, tender, gentle, condescending, and the like; but along with this series of thoughts we should encourage lofty and humbling contemplations of the majesty and awfulness of the divine name and character. Whilst we exalt the Cross (God forbid that we should ever cease to do so!) we should also fix our attention upon the throne, the crown, the sceptre, the symbols of ineffable and incomprehensible majesty. The Psalmist appears to follow this inspiration in the text; when he speaks of God's mercy, it fills all heaven with its brightness; and when he turns to God's truth, he finds it reaching up unto the clouds and filling the firmament with its glory. A decay of reverence is also a decay of tenderness. It is possible to look upon

majesty until tears overflow the eyes. One might suppose that the contemplation of majesty would simply lead to intellectual delight and growing intellectual strength. It is true that such a contemplation may be so used, but when it is properly associated we shall find that a right contemplation of God's majesty bows us down in tenderness, affecting not only the mind but the heart, and leading us to cry out, "Now mine eye seeth thee, I abhor myself in dust and ashes." We should often allow the soul to express itself in the most rapturous terms. Religion is nothing if it be expressible wholly in words. Occasionally we leave the region of words and pass into the higher region of feeling, ecstasy, unutterable delight and thanksgiving. Here it is that religion assists the expression of the highest life. We leave the words altogether and feel that in sounds of melody alone can we begin to express the higher and tenderer emotions of the soul. Beautiful is it to hear the Psalmist praising the kindness of God, and equally beautiful and grand is it to hear him exclaim, "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth."

"Trust in him at all times."—
PSALM lxii. 8.

The emphasis must be upon the continuousness of the trust. Occasional trust is continual infidelity. Spasmodic religion is but a variety of unbelief. In the regularity, the continuousness, it may be even the monotony, of our religious sacrifices we find their genuine worth. It is difficult for some minds to distinguish between that which is regular and that which is monotonous. We may so live as to make sunshine itself a monotony; or we may so use it as to find every day a poem, every season a vision and an apocalypse. Jo

said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." We are called upon to trust God where we cannot praise him. It is in the Garden of Gethsemane that we best can show the reality and force of our trust in God. Fair-weather religion is a mockery, a variety of selfishness, a mere sentiment that comes and goes with the sunshine. It is when our heart is overwhelmed within us that we should desire to be led to the Rock that is high and infinite. It is when our souls are filled with bitterness that we should declare we will not leave the strong tower of God. Here it is that the Christian has a constant opportunity for showing the completeness, the tenderness, and the practical value of faith. Even infidels may laugh at mid-day, and fools be glad in the time of abounding harvest; only he who lovingly trusts in God can be calm in the darkness, and sing songs of trust when the fig tree does not flourish. Trust of this kind amounts to an argument. It compels the attention of those who study the temper and action of our lives. Naturally they ask how is it that we are so sustained and comforted, and that when other men are complaining and repining we can repeat our prayer and sing the same song of trust, though sometimes, indeed, in a lower tone. We are watched when we stand by the graveside, and if there Christian faith can overcome human sorrow a tribute of praise is due to our principles. And many men may be prepared to render that tribute, and so bring themselves nearer to the kingdom of God. A beautiful refrain is this to our life-song, "Trust in him at all times"—in youth, in age, in sorrow, in joy, in poverty, in wealth; at all times, in good harvests and in bad harvests, in the wilderness and in the garden, on the firm earth and on the tumultuous sea; at all times, until time itself has mingled with eternity.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”—PSALM lxi. 18.

The notion is that a man is profess- edly praying and is at the same time really forming some unkind or wicked scheme in his heart. The morality of the Bible is thus brought into strong view. It will have everything right at the core, and not on the surface only. It will not have prayer regarded in its detached relation, but will search into all the circumstances and condi- tions of the heart which is professedly praying. We must bring a whole heart to the altar of prayer if our supplica- tions are to be answered. Suppose that a man is praying for the forgive- ness of his sins, and is at the same time considering in his heart how he may punish his adversaries, that man’s prayer is an empty wind which will never reach the heavens to which it is addressed. If we are praying for great mercies upon our household, and with- holding that which is due from the labourer, our prayer will be wasted breath. If we are orthodox in doctrine and heterodox in conduct, our hetero- doxy will keep our prayers out of heaven. A wonderful revelation this of the penetrating spirit of the Bible. It searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men; it is sharper than a two-edged sword, pierc- ing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow; the word of the Lord is a candle by which the heart is searched. All this, though terrible in one aspect and almost discouraging, is yet when viewed in its fullest relations, most assuring and comforting. It protects us against the prayers of wicked and unworthy men. We know that our enemies cannot pray against us, because being our enemies they cannot pray at all. The Lord will not hear any man whose heart is hard towards his brother

It is in vain that I seek mercy for my- self if I will not extend it to those who have wronged me. Except we forgive we cannot be forgiven. If we forgive not men from our hearts, neither will our Father in heaven forgive us. Again and again we come upon the holy thought that we are in reality just what we are in our heart or in our thought. A comforting reflection lies here, namely, that if our heart be free from guile, no matter how poor our words may be, they shall find acceptance in heaven. Not the prayer that is eloquent in language, but the prayer that is eloquent in sincerity, will be heard and answered from on high. Extend forgiveness to those who have trespassed against you, if you would be sure that your prayers will ascend to heaven and bring back answers of holy peace.

“Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.”—PSALM lxxvi. 11.

“When thou vowest a vow unt God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow than that thou shouldest vow, and not pay” (Eccl. v. 4, 5). The undisciplined mind may hereupon say, “Then I will not vow, and so I shall escape all responsibility.” It is a fool’s logic. See how contra- dictory it is. A man vows that he will not vow! He does the very thing which he declares he will never do. But the logic is no worse than the morality. Think of a man so arranging his life as to escape all responsibility! That is to destroy life,—to take out of it all symmetry, all strength, all mean- ing. Life itself is a responsibility. The man who proceeded upon the do-nothing principle was, in Christ’s parable, con- demned as a wicked and slothful ser- vant, and cast into outer darkness. Let

us make up our minds that there is no escape from responsibility, and that it must be met in a way that is wise, or in a way that is foolish. Let us inquire somewhat into the nature and scope of vows ; then look at the purely religious aspect of vowing ; and finally consider it in its practical bearing as upon God, ourselves, and society.—I. A vow is a resolution, and something more. You may resolve to be in France next week, but the resolution may amount merely to an expression of a conclusion which may be reversed by unforeseen occurrences. In this case the resolution is simply an affair of intention. You say you have made up your mind to a certain course, but something may happen to change your mind. A vow affects not only the judgment, but the heart. A vow should not be based upon expediency, but upon rectitude,—upon foundations which cannot change. It may be right to resolve to go home by a certain train, but it may be absurd to vow it. The question does not touch the region of conscience, obligation, or honour. It is a mere matter of arrangement, and may be changed at the dictation of circumstances. A resolution may be an effort of mere judgment,—a vow must be the expression of the heart. You resolve that your child shall wear a certain style of clothing, but were you to vow it you would be guilty of exaggeration,—you would thrust a mere trifle into association with the deepest solemnities of life ; you would make too much of it,—you would not exalt your taste, you would degrade your religion.—II. Vows are to be made to God, or in the name of God : they are deeply religious acts. “ And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace ; then shall the Lord be my God.” Life is made sublime by the fact

that it can in all its highest acts be in league and bond with God. Life is thus redeemed from lowness, littleness, poverty, commonplace, and vulgarity. Behaviour becomes an expression of deep conviction. Words are more than breath, they are the pulses of the soul. Vows are made in secret between the heart and God. They are made at the Cross. When spoken openly, they are spoken with fear. A vow is best made when the only auditor is God. What subjects, then, are fit for the solemnity of vows ? (1) The religious consecration of periods of time. (2) The godly training of children. (3) The religious devotion of sums of money. (4) A fuller dedication of energy to divine service. Then there is an inner region known only to the individual himself,—besetting sins, mortifications of passions, duties to those who have special claims upon us, care for others, and many points secret to each heart.—III. We are not only to vow, we are also to pay our vows. “ If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond ; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.” It is profane to treat a vow lightly. “ When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it : for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee ; and it would be sin in thee.” So a man's religion may actually be turned into aggravated impiety ! To vow, and not to pay, destroys the finest qualities and powers of manhood. Non-payment means diminution of soul-power,—exhaustion of spiritual force. In not paying a vow, man loses faith in himself : he is a liar to his own soul ! The spiritual and practical lesson is this : The great questions of life lie first between man and God,—not between man and man, but between man and God. A man must settle with God what ought to be done and how it ought

to be done, then he will be lifted above all social fear. Does he give money? He must give it first to God. Does he give time? Let him first give it to Jesus Christ. (1) Let us remember broken vows,—vows made in sickness, in high spiritual excitement, in extremity of fear, etc. (2) Let us make new vows. "It is high time to awake out of sleep," "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," etc. The only vow which can be fulfilled is the vow which is made in the name and strength of God.

"The Lord doth build up Jerusalem : he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars ; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power : his understanding is infinite."—PSALM cxlvii. 2-5.

Every revelation of the nature or attributes of God must be of supreme value to men who are not utterly debased in thought and feeling. God must ever be the one object about which our highest faculties are excited to their most resolute and vehement endeavours to know the truth. Granted that it is possible for the creature to know the Creator, then every other subject must have its value determined by its relation to that one sublime possibility. There are subjects which clear for themselves large spaces, so to speak, and define the proportions and limitations of a great many other subjects. See how this is constantly illustrated in ordinary life. A man proposes to build a house in a most lovely situation : the scene is variegated by hill and dale ; it is quiet, simple, and charming altogether. He will build. His heart is set upon the project.

Already in imagination he sees the edifice which is to be consecrated as his home. Timber is at hand, stones are within reach, the painter and decorator await but a call. But, but, but what? Why, there is no water! Not a well can be found. To sink for water would cost him more money than he can afford ; so, though everything else be forthcoming, the scheme must be abandoned for want of one thing!—What if a man should attempt to build a house upon principles contrary to geometry? Suppose he should discard the square, the plumb-line, and the rule? Every inch of his progress would be one inch nearer ruin. In building the meanest hovel you must work according to the laws which unite creation ; if you quarrel with astronomy or geometry, you build a structure which no mortal ingenuity or strength can prop ; the worlds are against you ; the stars fight for God.—In building a life he only is wise who consults the Creator ; who reverently inquires into his nature and sovereignty, and prays the Infinite to protect and teach the finite. History is the revealer of God. Experience, wide and deep knowledge of truth in actual life, teaches man the spirit and method of God's purpose and government. We cannot find out God abstractly ; we cannot know him as he is, except through the medium of what he does ; and herein is the value of spiritual testimony, the worth and power of the experience which has tested the mercy and wisdom of God.—Take the text as an example. This testimony is more than an abstract argument, it is the solemn oath of men who have lived this most blessed experience, or have so watched the ways of God as to speak as emphatically of the stars as of hearts that have been healed. It is the healed heart that most clearly sees the hand of God amongst the stars. The

heart teaches the intellect ; the heart says, "See! the God who cares for thee cares also for the frail lily, the fluttering bird, the shining star." So the life of man becomes the practical interpreter of God, and experience sees his presence everywhere.—Let us regard the text in the light of our own consciousness and experience, that we may see how unchangeable is God in the might of his arm and the tenderness of his heart.—The text reveals the constructive side of the divine government.—I. As shown in the building up of the Church.—"The Lord doth build up Jerusalem," etc. That he should do so, shows (1) that the church is self-demolished ; (2) that it is self-helpless ; and (3) that God is the gatherer, the redeemer, and the builder of the church.—It is not God's purpose to destroy. It is his very nature to preserve, extend, complete, and glorify. He does destroy, but never willingly. His arm does not become terrible until his heart has been grieved, until his patience has been exhausted, and until the vital interests of the universe have been put in peril.—II. As seen in the gentle care of human hearts.—"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." Still, you see how constructive and preservative is God. His work is edification, not destruction. Who cares for broken-hearted men? Who has patience with the weak and faint? The greater the nature, the greater the compassion. "It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men." Learn from this gentle care of human hearts.—First: The personality of God's knowledge. He knows every bruised reed. Hearts suffer in secret ; there is nothing hidden from God!—Second: The infinite adaptations of divine grace. Every heart, whatever its grief, may be healed! There is "a sovereign balm for every wound." Are we wounded on account

of sin? are we writhing under the agonies of penitence? are we tortured by circumstances over which we have no control—the waywardness of children, physical prostration, the opposition of bad men, and the like? For every wound there is healing in the grace of God! Third: The perfectness of divine healing. Other healers say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Others "heal the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly." God complained to Ezekiel, "One built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar." We are not healed until God heals us. God offers to heal us ; our disease and our sorrow are challenges to prove his grace. What of the responsibility of refusal?—III. As seen in the order, the regularity, and the stability of creation.—"He telleth the number of the stars ; he calleth them all by their names." Creation is a volume open to all eyes. Read it, and see the might of gentleness, the wisdom and patience of God. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number : He calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power ; not one faileth." Jesus Christ taught us to reason from the natural to the spiritual : "Consider the lilies," etc. ; "Behold the fowls of the air," etc.—(1) God takes care of the great universe, may I not trust him with my life?—(2) Where God's will is unquestioned, the result is light, beauty, music : why should I oppose myself to its gracious dominion?—In the grandeur, stability, perfectness of the universe, we see what God would do in our lives, did we call him to the throne of our love.—The subject has applied itself as we have proceeded from point to point ; still we may linger one moment more on flowers laden with such honey. Let the church

be of good courage : "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory." "The gates of hell shall not prevail."—Are we truly broken in heart? Hear, then, the Saviour : "He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,"—sent his Son to heal us!—Are we contrite, humble, penitent? "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy : I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart

of the contrite ones." Our brokenness attracts Him. The cry of our sorrows brings him down from heaven. "Ah Lord God ! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee : thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them : The great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name ; great in counsel, and mighty in work !"

NOTES ON THE PSALTER.

"My voice is unto God, and I will cry" (Ps. lxxvii. 1), might well stand as a motto to the whole of the Psalter ; for, whether immersed in the depths, or whether blessed with greatness and comfort on every side, it is to God that the Psalmist's voice seems ever to soar spontaneously aloft. Alike in the welcome of present deliverance or in the contemplation of past mercies, he addresses himself straight to God as the object of his praise. Alike in the persecutions of his enemies and the desertions of his friends, in wretchedness of body and in the agonies of inward repentance, in the hour of impending danger and in the hour of apparent despair, it is direct to God that he utters forth his supplications. Despair, we say ; for such, as far as the description goes, is the Psalmist's state in Ps. lxxviii. But meanwhile he is praying ; the apparent impossibility of deliverance cannot restrain his God-ward voice ; and so the very force of communion with God carries him, almost unawares to himself, through the trial.

Connected with this is the faith by which he everywhere lives in God rather than in himself. God's mercies, God's greatness, form the sphere in which his thoughts are ever moving : even when through excess of affliction reason is rendered powerless, the naked contemplation of God's wonders of old forms his effectual support (Ps. lxx.).

It is of the essence of such faith that the Psalmist's view of the perfections of God should be true and vivid. The Psalter describes God as he is : it glows with testimonies to his power and providence, his love and faithfulness, his holiness and righteousness. Correspondingly it testifies against every form of idol which men would substitute in the living God's place : whether it be the outward image, the work of men's hands (Ps. cxv.), or whether it be the inward vanity of earthly comfort or prosperity, to be purchased at the cost of the honour which cometh from God alone (Ps. iv.). The solemn "See that there is no idol-way (רֵדֶךְ עֵצִי) in me" of Ps. cxxxix., the striving of the heart after the very truth and nought beside, is the exact anticipation of the "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," of the loved Apostle in the N. T.

The Psalms not only set forth the perfections of God : they proclaim also the duty of worshipping him by the acknowledgment and adoration of his perfections. They encourage all outward rites and means of worship : new songs, use of musical instruments of all kinds, appearance in God's courts, lifting up of hands, prostration at his footstool, holy apparel (A.V. "beauty

of holiness"). Among these they recognise the ordinance of sacrifice (Ps. iv., v., xxvii., li.) as an expression of the worshipper's consecration of himself to God's service. But not the less do they repudiate the outward rite when separated from that which it was designed to express (Ps. xl., lxix.): a broken and contrite heart is, from erring man, the genuine sacrifice which God requires (Ps. li.).

Similar depth is observable in the view taken by the Psalmists of human sin. It is to be traced not only in its outward manifestations, but also in the inward workings of the heart (Ps. xxxvi.), and is to be primarily ascribed to man's innate corruption (Ps. li., lviii.). It shows itself alike in deeds, in words (Ps. xvii., cxli.), and in thoughts (Ps. cxxxix.); nor is even the believer able to discern all its various ramifications (Ps. xix.). Connected with this view of sin is, on the one hand, the picture of the utter corruption of the ungodly world (Ps. xiv.); on the other, the encouragement to genuine repentance, the assurance of divine forgiveness (Ps. xxxii.), and the trust in God as the source of complete redemption (Ps. cxxx.).

In regard of the law, the Psalmist, while warmly acknowledging its excellence, feels yet that it cannot so effectually guide his own unassisted exertions as to preserve him from error (Ps. xix.). He needs an additional grace from above, the grace of God's Holy Spirit (Ps. li.). But God's Spirit is also a free spirit (*ib.*): led by this he will discern the law, with all its precepts, to be no arbitrary rule of bondage, but rather a charter and instrument of liberty (Ps. cxix.).

The Psalms bear repeated testimony to the duty of instructing others in the ways of holiness (Ps. xxxii., xxxiv., li.). They also indirectly enforce the duty of love, even to our enemies (Ps. vii. 4, xxxv. 13, cix. 4). On the other hand, they imprecate, in the strongest terms, the judgments of God on transgressors. Such imprecations are levelled at transgressors as a body, and are uniformly uttered on the hypothesis of their wilful persistence in evil, in which case the overthrow of the sinner becomes a necessary part of the uprooting of sin. They are in nowise inconsistent with any efforts to lead sinners individually to repentance.

This brings us to notice, lastly, the faith of the Psalmists in a righteous recompense to all men according to their deeds (Ps. xxxvii., etc.). They generally expected that men would receive such recompense in great measure during their own lifetime. Yet they felt withal that it was not then complete: it perpetuated itself to their children (Ps. xxxvii. 25, cix. 12, etc.); and thus we find set forth in the Psalms, with sufficient distinctness, though in an immatured and consequently imperfect form, the doctrine of a retribution after death.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

The following is a list of the chief passages in the Psalms which are in anywise quoted or embodied in the N. T.:—Ps. ii. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, iv. 4, v. 9, vi. 3, 8, viii. 2, 4-6, x. 7, xiv. 1-3, xvi. 8-11, xviii. 4, 49, xix. 4, xxii. 1, 8, 18, 22, xxiii. 6, xxiv. 1, xxxi. 5, xxxii. 1, 2, xxxiv. 8, 12-16, 20, xxxv. 9, xxxvi. 1, xxxvii. 11, xl. 6-8, xli. 9, xlv. 22, xlv. 6, 7, xlviii. 2, li. 4, lv. 22, lxviii. 18, lxix. 4, 9, 22, 23, 25, lxxv. 8, lxxviii. 2, 24, lxxxii. 6, lxxxvi. 9, lxxxix. 20, xc. 4, xci. 11, 12, xcii. 7, xciv. 11, xcvi. 7-11, cii. 25-27, civ. 4, cix. 8, cx. 1, 4, cxii. 9, cxvi. 10, cxvii. 1, cxviii. 6, 22, 23, 25, 26, cxxv. 5, cxl. 3.—*Ibid.*

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